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GERALD

BY

ELEANOR C. PRICE

Author of "Valentina," "Mrs. Lancaster's Rival," "The Foreigners," etc.



IN THREE VOLUMES
VOL. III.

London
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GERALD.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A TRUE LOVER.

CLARENCE LITTON, though not himself renowned for unselfishness, thought that his brother was doing a selfish and unreasonable, as well as an absurd thing, in asking Theo to go out to him. He was one of those practical men who know everything; he knew all the difficulties in the way, all the hardships that Theo would have to go through; he knew that if she carried out her romantic plan of starting off at once, she would arrive at the very worst time of

year; and he was angry with Gerald for not considering these things. He talked to Theo as much as he dared, and strongly advised her at least to wait a few months; but he soon saw that he might as well talk to the wind that was shaking the lilac-bushes, and after that he said no more. He shrugged his shoulders, and reflected that he was not responsible for the scrapes into which these foolish creatures would no doubt run themselves. If he had not liked and admired Theo, he would not even have troubled himself, as he did, to write a scolding to Gerald. This would be much too late to do any good, but was a little salve to his conscience, for he knew it was originally his fault that Gerald had gone to Africa at all.

Even Ada, who thought him perfect, was surprised that Gerald should have asked Theo to go out to him. She could not understand

the violent reaction which had almost driven the young fellow out of his senses, when, after a journey more fatiguing than anything he had ever gone through in his life, he found Theo's letter waiting for him at Kimberley, the mail having passed him and arrived a few days before. Something in her letter, something she had said about separation, made him think that she would come if he asked her. He had come out with the notion that he could never live in England again. Then, if they still belonged to each other, if she cared for him in spite of the disgrace, what was the use of waiting? Life here without her had seemed terribly hopeless before; it seemed impossible now. He had seen enough already, among the men he had met—enough of their temptations and their wrecked lives, to make him dread and doubt the future,

unless she would come and be his guardian-angel.

“I can’t live without her,” Gerald argued; “and if she cares for me as much as I do for her, she will come.”

And so he did that selfish thing, though he hated the country, and the people, and all the surroundings, and knew that they must be more repulsive to her than to him—he told her that he would not wait for an answer to his letter, but would go down to Cape Town and meet the first mail-steamer that left England after she received it—“Just on the chance of your coming to me, my darling.”

So that Theo had only one week to make up her mind, and get her outfit, and say “good-bye” to everything she cared for in England, for her departure was to be as sudden as Gerald’s own.

Making up her mind was not a long affair, for she did that while she read his letter.

Then she had turned to Clarence Litton, and said very sweetly :

“ I shall have a great many things to do. Will you help me ? ”

“ With pleasure,” said Clarence. “ I wish I could escort you out. But of course you will take your maid ? ”

“ I don’t want her to go, poor thing ! but she says she will,” said Theo.

Combe had absolutely refused to be left behind, and as it was impossible to go alone, Theo had consented to take her.

In that week there was no time to think, or talk, or do anything but prepare for that long journey with such a strange end to it.

Clarence was very uneasy, for he thought that this girl did not the least understand what she was doing, but he made no more

remonstrances, and devoted himself to her service with all the wit and experience he had—and these were not small. He took her passage in the steamer, going on board himself to arrange everything for her; he thought of everything that she and Combe could possibly want on the voyage, and made Theo laugh by the lists of things he insisted on ordering.

Theo herself was thinking a great deal of Ada, and very little of her own wants. After she had paid a visit to her bankers, and asked them, much to their surprise, to transfer all her money to a bank at Kimberley, she became quite unpractical as regarded herself.

Clarence Litton and Combe—a strange pair of workers—arranged all the luggage as they thought best, and Clarence proposed to himself, though not yet to her, to

take her down to Southampton and see her off.

The packet sailed from Southampton on Thursday. The weather was very hot, and Ada, who had been quite miserable since Gerald's letter came, and had shared with Combe all sorts of sad forebodings, which she hid from Theo, had cried herself on Tuesday into a helpless headache. It was their last day together, for Theo was going to take her to Mrs. Keene's on Wednesday, and leave her there, before she went down to Southampton.

The child lay on the sofa in the hot, oppressive afternoon, her face buried in the cushions, with a sob breaking out sometimes. Theo, who had tried in vain to comfort her, was now writing a letter to Lady Redcliff; she had written her other letters the day before—one to Nell, one

to Hugh. This time last year they had been her nearest and dearest, and she had been fretting her life away with her grandmother in the Square. Now she had written to them both to tell them how they had really lost her—a short, gentle answer to that letter of Nell's which had hurt her so, a still shorter note to Hugh, just telling him what she was going to do, without any allusion of any kind to the past, and adding at the end, with all her old faith in Hugh, "Will you take care of Wool? I am leaving him with these people for the present. Tell him not to forget me."

Theo had not written to her grandmother; they had had no communication since they parted at Locarno; but that Tuesday morning she had gone alone to the Square, and asked a strange man-

servant if Lady Redcliff would see her. The answer was real pain. No, Lady Redcliff could not see Miss Meynell. The man looked curiously at her as she turned away with her air of fine scorn; but Theo's heart felt cold and heavy, in spite of her stately looks, and she had spent half the afternoon in composing a letter to her grandmother.

She was very sad and tired that afternoon; the week of hurry and intense excitement was telling upon her. Ada's grief weighed down her spirits; the world was noisy, and dusty, and intensely hot; the rooms were in a state of dismal untidiness after her packing and Ada's. She sat at the table, bending and frowning over her letter; she had pushed her long white fingers through her hair, pressing it back from her forehead, on which the blue veins

showed how tired she was. There were dark stains under her eyes, her face was thinner than it used to be; she was carelessly dressed, for in the wild hurry of that week Combe had had no time to bestow on her mistress.

The fat little landlady opened the door, announcing "Captain North," and this was how Hugh saw his beautiful cousin. That day, in the winter, how different she had looked; soft, calm, blooming, noble, when her cruel hardness had crushed all his hopes.

She started violently, and almost screamed, when she heard his name. Ada sprang up from the sofa, and with red eyes and cheeks flew out of the room; and Hugh stood still in the midst of all the confusion, in a sort of dismay, facing Theo, while the landlady shut the door behind him.

“Shall I go away?” he said in a low voice, as he and Theo looked at each other. “I don’t want to bore you, Theo.”

She stood for a moment quite still, without answering him, only looking at him, and seeing and feeling his sadness, his perfect constancy.

“Oh, Hugh!” she said at last, breathlessly, for all the old days were coming back, the happy years long vanished, when she was a girl, and he was her dear elder brother, always patient, and strong, and kind. He was different from everybody else, dear Hugh; his friendship was worth more, almost, than anything in the world; and for the moment Theo could forget how he had spoilt it, and was so glad, so sorry to see him again, that she hid her face in her hands, forgetting all her dignity, and sobbed like a child.

"Don't, my dear!" said Hugh under his breath.

He made a quick step forward, standing near her at the end of the table; she had sat down again, still hiding her face, and struggling to control herself.

Hugh was very white, and it is possible that there were tears in his eyes too, as he stood there looking at her.

"I never meant to distress you like this," he said, as she became a little calmer. "What is it?—what is troubling you? I only want to be of use to you, if you'll let me, Theo. I know you have made up your mind."

His low, grave tones were very soothing. Theo held out one hand to him, still hiding her eyes with the other. He took it after an instant's hesitation, pressed it gently, and let it go. Then he walked across to

the window, and stood there silently for three or four minutes, till at last she spoke to him.

“Come here — come and sit down,” she said. “It is very kind of you.”

Hugh took a chair, and sat down a few yards from her. He looked pale and quiet, his fair moustache and his heavy eyelids drooping; the perfection of his dress was in odd contrast with all that surrounded him; he looked down at his hat and stick, and played with them a little.

Whatever his intentions might have been, this was a moment that tried the honesty of them, but if there was any struggle in his mind, nobody could see it.

“I thought you might like me to take Wool back to-day,” he said. “In that case he won’t suffer any loneliness, though I don’t know how he is to understand what

has happened, poor old boy! But you are quite right not to think of taking him with you. He would be a bore, besides which, the climate would probably kill him."

"I never thought of it," said Theo. "Thank you very much."

She had never felt more confused and miserable. If Hugh had been reproachful, or had shown any violent feeling in any way, she could have been proud, and scornful, and angry. As it was, he seemed to be heaping coals of fire on her head. After the first agitation at seeing him, she began to wish that he had not come; but presently she withdrew that wish, for every moment it became easier to talk to him. He was so wonderfully considerate and calm; he began asking a few little insignificant questions about her plans, the time she meant to leave

London, the time the ship sailed, and then he said, looking rather more intently at his hat:

“If you don’t mind, I should be very glad if you would let me see you off, unless you have made some other arrangement.”

“Thank you — oh no; I shall be very glad,” said Theo, gently. “Combe is going with me, you know.”

Hugh nodded.

“Does Lady Redcliff——” he began.

“Grandmamma is very angry with me; she won’t see me,” said Theo, her voice trembling a little. “I was writing to her when you came in.”

“Well——” said Hugh; and then, after a pause, he went on: “Do you know that you are going out at the worst time of year? The spring out there is most unhealthy.”

"Yes, I have been told so," she answered, "but I don't think I am a feverish person."

"I should be rather doubtful about that," said Hugh. "I hope you will take every precaution. Have you been led to think that Kimberley is a nice place?"

"I have not heard much about it. No, I suppose not."

"I have known men who have been there," said Hugh gloomily, "and they agreed in describing it as a sort of Sodom and Gomorrah."

"I hope it is not so bad as that," said Theo. "Don't frighten me, and don't bother yourself about me, Hugh. Don't you know that I have a great deal of strength in reserve, and that all my life I have longed for some real adventures? Travelling in that country must really be great fun. Sleeping out of

doors, for instance, and waking up to see the stars shining."

"You!" he said, with an almost angry emphasis; but then he looked up, and met a smile which seemed to bring all the old times back again.

Theo was much more like herself now; the high spirit of her girlhood had come back suddenly, and was lighting up her pale face. Hugh gave a quick sigh, and looked down again.

"You must come out some day, and spend your leave with us," she said, and then she knew she was cruel.

He shook his head.

"You are most kind," he said; "but I like civilisation." Then he added: "All your relations have been in a dreadful state of mind for months, including myself, Theo."

"I am glad one of them has come to

wish me good-bye," she said. "Yes, John told me, one day when he was here, that I must choose between them and—and Nell agrees with him, and I thought you did too."

"John is an ass—I mean he is not my superior officer," said Hugh hastily. "As for me, I can't afford to lose you altogether, though I did think, not long ago, that I wished never to see you again. And so now I want to ask you a great favour, Theo. Will you grant it?"

"I will," said Theo.

Her ready answer pleased him very much; this trust in him was some slight reward for the long, hard battle in which he had come off conqueror.

"Thank you, my dear," he said in his gravest manner. "I want you to forget last winter, and to let everything be now as if it had never been."

“Very well, Hugh; thank you, I will,” she answered very softly, and after a pause she went on: “I wish I had written to you sooner.”

“So do I,” said Hugh, “for I might have done a great many things for you, and I am afraid you have tired yourself dreadfully—a bad preparation for your start. Now tell me a little more about your arrangements.”

There he stayed for hours, and Theo, keeping her word to him, and doing what he wished without any afterthought, told him everything, and listened meekly to a great deal of good advice. Hugh behaved like a hero; he bore her mention of Clarence Litton with calm indifference, and when Clarence actually interrupted them by coming into the room, his manner to him was not absolutely crushing. Clarence went away at once to

find Ada, and soon after this Hugh said that he must go.

He took both Theo's hands, and bent over her, and kissed her gently on the forehead, as he used to do when she was a girl.

"Do you remember something you promised me," he said, "the evening before Helen was married?"

"Yes, I have thought of it," said Theo; "but there are promises one can't keep."

"Don't make any more of that kind," said Hugh. "Then I shall meet you to-morrow at Waterloo, and in the meanwhile where is Mr. Wool?"

CHAPTER XXIX.

AT SEA.

WHEN Theo had time to think, when she was left alone on board the mail-steamer at Southampton, when the bell had rung, and Hugh's tall figure had disappeared among the crowd, she was seized with a terrible loneliness. All the old peaceful trust in Hugh had come back within the last two days, brought to life again by his own generous unselfishness. She knew that he loved her now, just as he did in the winter, when he asked her to marry him; she knew, when she thought about it quietly, that he always would love

her just the same ; but she was not angry with him now, only sad and sorry. She knew now that this love was of a high kind, worthy of that lover who said :

For I love you so,
That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot,
If thinking on me then should make you woe.

This is possible, but it is very rare, and seldom understood or rewarded in this life.

Theo understood it better than many women do, and perhaps Gerald, for whom she was giving up everything, would hardly have approved of the tears that dimmed her eyes as she looked back at England, and thought regretfully and tenderly of Hugh. He had made her promise that she would write to him, and would tell him if there was anything in the world that he could do for her.

Theo had an instinctive feeling that she

would break this last promise, and that Hugh's help, dear and valuable as it must always be, would be the last thing she would ask for in future.

Their parting had been very friendly and grave; both faces were sad. Hugh had not tormented her with a word of remonstrance; he had inspected her cabin, had talked to the captain, had hardly, to outward eyes, shown as much feeling as her brother would have shown under such circumstances.

At the last moment he discovered some slight acquaintances of his own among the passengers—a Colonel and Mrs. Forester, who were going back to an appointment at Cape Town. In his gravest, most indifferent manner, Hugh introduced his cousin to these people, who looked at her kindly; but Theo was rather vexed and bored by the introduction; she had had a fancy for being

quite alone, and dreaming, and watching the sea, all the way out to Cape Town.

Colonel Forester, a good-humoured, middle-aged man, who had known Hugh's father pretty well some years before, was a little puzzled by the mystery of this girl's going out alone. He seized Hugh just as he was leaving the ship.

"Your cousin is of course going to some friends at the Cape?" he said. "We can't be of any use out there?"

"Thank you," said Hugh with a curious coldness of look and manner; "I can hardly answer. There is only one person—in fact, my cousin is going out to be married. I suppose he will meet her."

"Oh, very well," said Colonel Forester. "Then of course he will have made all arrangements. Do I know him, I wonder?"

"That is not likely," said Hugh. "He

went out last spring to the Diamond Fields. His name is Fane."

"You astonish me!" said Colonel Forester. "Miss Meynell surely—— But I beg your pardon," as Hugh turned a little paler, and made a movement to go; "I only meant to say that Mrs. Forester and I will be very glad if we can be of any use."

"Thank you, Colonel Forester. I shall be most grateful," said Hugh; and then he shook hands with the Colonel, and went gravely on shore.

Colonel Forester went back to his wife and told her the explanation of the mystery, adding that this marriage was plainly against the wish of the young lady's relations.

"You must be kind to the poor girl," said the Colonel, in his eager manner. "This Diamond Fields fellow will be marrying her from St. George's Hotel, or something of

that sort. She must be married from our house."

Mrs. Forester was very gentle, rather shy, and full of that active goodness which soldiers' wives so often have in perfection. She had lost all her children when they were little, and this, and the sweetness of her brown eyes, and the clearness of her wits, may have explained the fact that she ruled the Colonel with an undisputed sway. She had also ruled his regiment when he had been attached to one.

On this occasion she did not quite agree with him.

"Don't say anything about that yet," she said. "The Meynells are not a very nice family; and as to my being kind to this girl, she looks so cold and stiff that I am afraid of her. I don't think she wants me, Arthur, really."

“How can a girl be going out alone, and not want you?” asked Colonel Forester.

His wife laughed and shook her head.

For the first few days Theo was very much alone, and seemed to wish to be so. Her looks and ways kept people at a distance; the only person who talked to her much was Colonel Forester, who admired her, and took a great interest in her, and was a good-natured chatterbox besides. His friendship with her advanced much faster than his wife's. Mrs. Forester did not quite like the idea of a girl of good family starting off in this adventurous manner against the wish of her friends; she was also puzzled by the fact that Theo was making a sort of friendship with a very odd little woman, who emerged from her cabin after two or three days, and walked feebly about on deck, holding Theo's arm. She was dressed very smartly, and

had a black, untidy fringe hanging over her forehead; she went off into silly fits of laughter, and sometimes had a little dark baby in her arms, and a second-rate young man standing by her side; but this young man was generally playing cards, or amusing himself in some way apart from his wife. Mrs. Forester had several friends on board, and neither she nor any of them thought these people at all fit to speak to. She would not have noticed them among the varied crowd of passengers, unless they had appealed to her kindness in some way, but the sympathy that Theo showed this little creature was a strange thing, and attracted Mrs. Forester's eyes, which, with all their softness, had a keen power of watching. Even Colonel Forester was puzzled, and held a little back from his friend Miss Meynell, when she sat for a whole evening

beside this woman on deck, under the glorious stars, and the strange pair of friends talked in a low voice together, each deeply interested in what the other was saying.

At last the little woman gathered up her shawls and went below, and Theo sat still where she was, looking out upon the sea. Some yards away Colonel Forester was standing behind his wife's chair. They had been drinking coffee, and talking to some of their friends, who had now left them; the eyes and thoughts of both husband and wife turned towards Theo.

"Now, I shall go and talk to her," whispered the Colonel. "Will you come, too?"

"Suppose I go by myself?" said Mrs] Forester softly.

"That's a capital idea, Fanny. Ask her to go ashore with us to-morrow."

"We shall see," said Mrs. Forester, and she moved gently across and joined Theo.

She sat down, and began talking about Madeira, where they would arrive the next day. Theo talked too, but in such a dreamy way that Mrs. Forester found it very difficult to go on with the conversation ; still, in spite of Theo's most absent answers, the soft beauty of her profile, the light and depth in her eyes when she looked up, the noble gentleness that seemed to breathe about her like an atmosphere, all charmed and attracted Mrs. Forester, so that she felt no wish to get up and go away.

"This is a very remarkable girl," she thought to herself, and she studied Theo through one or two long silences, during which the other people laughed and talked in the distance and somebody was singing ; and through it all the steamer throbbed and

panted, and the water washed gently along her sides, and she left a long luminous path over the dark sea in her wake, and the great stars shone down gloriously.

“Do you like being at sea? I suppose it is your first long voyage?” said Mrs. Forester.

“It is lovely,” said Theo. “Yes; I have only crossed the Channel.”

“I wonder if you have any idea of what — what Africa is like?” said Mrs. Forester after a pause.

“Not much, I suppose,” said Theo, “though I have been thinking about it. But it must be rather free and glorious. It is very sad to go out there, meaning to hate it, like that poor little thing.”

“Do you mean——” began Mrs. Forester.

“That little Mrs. Lee. We are going to the same place, you know—the Diamond

Fields, and she is so unhappy ; she thinks it is all so dreadful."

"I am afraid the Fields——" said Mrs. Forester, and then she stopped herself, for she did not like to prophesy evil.

"She is so ill and miserable, and so anxious about her baby, and I think her husband is not very nice," said Theo. "I am very sorry for her."

"You have been very kind to her," said Mrs. Forester ; "but she laughs a good deal ; is she really so miserable ?"

"Oh, she is young ; she must laugh sometimes. I have tried to comfort her. I have told her that I shall be there too, and that I will try to help her," said Theo, gravely.

Mrs. Forester sighed.

"You will find a good many unhappy women there," she said ; "the men are not

a nice set. And don't you know anybody—have you no friends at all out there? You won't like me to say it, it sounds cold and worldly, but you must not have that sort of people for your friends. I suppose, though, Mr. Fane has been there already, and he will know."

"Yes; but it can't be quite like England, can it?" said Theo gently.

"It will not be at all like England, my dear—the England you belong to. I am afraid, after a time, you won't like it very much. Are you likely to stay there long?"

"Oh yes, I think so, for a great many years," said Theo.

Mrs. Forester asked a few little questions, and Theo told her a great deal about herself and Gerald, and their prospects as far as she knew them. She suddenly discovered

that it was comforting to talk peacefully under the stars to this kind woman, whose manner was so gentle and soft, and who seemed to understand all her feelings so well. For Mrs. Forester had a charming way of listening and of sympathising when she had got over her first little shyness with a person she did not know. Every word that Theo said interested her more deeply in this girl, who was going out in such faith and confidence to a life she could not possibly realise, and trying to support other wayfarers as she went along. To think that she knew no one—absolutely no one—in that great, terrible continent; that everything depended for her on the arrangements of one young man—her lover, certainly, but did that ensure the perfect thoughtfulness needed by a romantic, refined girl like this? Mrs. Forester's heart was touched; all the feelings

of a mother, so long buried under silent grief, woke up into life again as she sat beside Theo, and thought, "This might have been my child." At last, when they had talked for a long time, she laid her hand on Theo's, and said :

"My dear, when we reach Cape Town you must let me take you to my house. You must belong to me till I give you up to Mr. Fane."

"Oh, thank you! What makes you so good to me?" said Theo, and, with a sudden impulse, she stooped, and touched Mrs. Forester's pretty soft hand with her lips. "But he may have arranged something already," she added, hesitating and blushing.

"He is not likely to have made a better arrangement than mine," said Mrs. Forester.

The next morning they anchored off

Madeira, and Theo went ashore with the Foresters and some of their friends, She was quite happy now ; the sadness, the regrets, the anxieties of England were fading in the distance, and Gerald was waiting for her not so very far off, in a country perhaps as beautiful as this, where the sun shone everlastingly, and the brown-faced people laughed gaily, and flowers that she had never dreamed of grew in glorious gardens, green paradises among the ridges of red rock. Colonel Forester was charmed with her enthusiasm. The blue sea danced and sparkled, rocking the little red and green boats that darted over it ; the brown divers, with their white teeth and flashing eyes, splashed and laughed and screamed about the ship in a storm of silver spray. On shore the waves broke gently at the foot of great brown rocks, garlanded above with green and scarlet. The narrow, stony

streets, with their deep black shadows and brilliant lights, the market loaded with fruit, the dark-eyed people with their bright handkerchiefs, made Theo think of Italy. She stayed on shore all day, and Colonel Forester went about with her everywhere, showing her his favourite views. One was only more enchanting than another.

It seemed strange to be off again, but Theo was much happier after that landing at Madeira. Her kindness to Mrs. Lee was not at all affected by her new friendship with Mrs. Forester, who had entirely taken possession of her now. It was a new thing in Theo's life to have a woman like this for her friend, who had been trained by trouble, who knew the world without being worldly, and whose warm, affectionate, unselfish nature was made strong and beautiful by religion. In those long days and evenings

they had many talks, and Mrs. Forester soon knew all Theo's history, and, suspecting that Gerald Fane was not quite her equal, thought of giving her up to him with pain.

And so they sailed on, past Teneriffe, half-hidden in clouds, over a sea brilliant by day, and crowded with flying-fish, phosphorescent at night under the moon and the deep blue sky. They went on shore again at St. Helena, and climbed about the stern old rock till they were tired.

After that Cape Town seemed to be very near, and the old dreaminess came over Theo again. She roused herself, however, and spent more time than ever in comforting Mrs. Lee, whose husband had proved more and more on the voyage what a worthless fellow he was. This poor little thing dreaded the future so much, that she could not speak of it without tears. Theo tried hard to make her look on

the bright side of things, listening patiently to her complaints, and promising to be her friend always; and Mrs. Forester could not remonstrate any more.

As the days went on, she and her husband became more and more anxious to see Gerald Fane, and to convince themselves that he would make his wife happy. They both doubted it, they could hardly tell why, for Theo's confidence in him was as deep as her love. She was almost silent on the subject, but Mrs. Forester knew that very well.

"The impudence, though, of asking a girl like that to go to the Fields!" was Colonel Forester's constant theme.

"I would have gone there with you, Arthur," said his wife.

"You would not have been allowed, my dear," said the Colonel. "Women like you and Miss Meynell are very generous creatures,

and their goodness ought not to be taken advantage of."

"When you were young," said Mrs. Forester, "I suspect you would have been of a different opinion."

"Never," said the Colonel. "I was never so conceited, to begin with. I never thought you would feel hardships and discomforts less because you were married to me."

Mrs. Forester laughed.

"I don't suppose I should," said she. "Miss Meynell is made of finer stuff. She will bear anything for the sake of that young man. Her courage won't fail."

"Her health will, and her spirit, too, in time," said the Colonel. "I can't bear the thought of that young man."

At last the Twelve Apostles rose out of the sea, and Table Mountain, dark and stern,

and a white town lying under the hills, the docks, and masts, and trees, all in the clear brilliant air of a southern morning. It was very early when they entered the docks, and the sun shone on Theo's first sight of her new country. She and Mrs. Forester were standing on deck in all the confusion, wrapped in shawls, for the morning was cold; in that part of the world it was spring.

Theo's eyes were fixed on the long road beyond the docks, crowded with Malay carts, and with people of every complexion, dressed in all sorts of gay colours. Though she looked, she did not see much; she was dreaming, hardly realising that this was Cape Town, hardly expecting, in spite of all, to see Gerald really.

Mrs. Forester was looking for him in a much more wakeful fashion. It was she, not Theo, who saw a tall young man come

on board, and make his way quietly through the crowd on deck, and approach them gently, with his eyes fixed on Theo, who did not see him.

It was indeed the story of the Sleeping Beauty telling itself over again, as all the old stories do. There she stood, statuesque and still, cold, absent, quiet, and a little sad, as she gazed straight before her.

Mrs. Forester was just going to touch her, and to point out Gerald, who was within a few yards of them now, but he came up too quickly at last, and stood suddenly between Theo and her dreams, as he used in the early days of their acquaintance.

All the absence and the vagueness were gone then. Mrs. Forester just caught the one quick glance that she gave Gerald, and the sudden flush and softening that came into her face, and then left them together,

and turned away to her husband, who came up to her just then. She was laughing, and her eyes were full of tears.

“By Jove, Fanny!” muttered the Colonel, “you were never so glad to see me!”

She took no notice of this accusation.

“He is a dear fellow, but not very strong,” she whispered. “But I like him extremely. Oh, Arthur, they can’t go to the Fields.”

“And you really are actually come!” said Gerald, standing by Theo, and looking down into her happy face.

“Didn’t you know?” she said in a low voice.

“Did I? Well, ever since I wrote to you I’ve known how awfully selfish I was. But it’s all right now. You won’t be sorry that you came?”

“Gerald!” she said, with the faintest shade of reproach and sadness; and there was no more time to talk then.

For Combe joined her mistress, and Mrs. Lee struggled up to say "good-bye," and giggled horribly in Gerald's face, and then Theo remembered that she must introduce him to the Foresters, and in all the confusion of going on shore the impatient fellow began to think that he would never have her to himself after all.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE OLD DUTCH HOUSE.

COLONEL AND MRS. FORESTER had a pleasant little English-looking house with a verandah, looking out on fresh-leaved oak-trees. All the front was clustered over with early roses, and there were aloes and other strange plants in the garden. To the right, not far away, towered the great dark wall of Table Mountain. Here Theo spent her first few days of Africa. Gerald was with her constantly, and after the first almost painful excitement of meeting again, they were both perfectly happy.

Poor Combe was happy, too, in being on dry land again, and in adding various things to her mistress's outfit, under Mrs. Forester's directions; but she was much plagued with anxiety about the future, for Mrs. Lee had poisoned her mind.

Gerald had, of course, made his own arrangements for his marriage, in case Theo really came to him. He had consulted some friendly people at the Fields and they had been quite sure she would come. By their advice he meant to take her to St. George's Hotel, to get a special license, and be married at the cathedral in the next day or two; the captain of her ship would probably consent to give her away. So far, these easily-made plans were knocked on the head by the intervention of Mrs. Forester; it had never struck him that Theo would have any friends of her own, and at first he was inclined to

think the good Foresters a bore ; but these ungrateful thoughts soon vanished.

His friends at the Fields had done him one real kindness : they had offered to lend him a house at Wynberg, that pleasant place eight miles from Cape Town. Here he and Theo could have a fortnight of perfect peace before they began the weary journey to their new home.

Mrs. Forester approved highly of this part of his arrangements. She only wished that the marriage could have been put off a little longer, for she had discovered, in her talks with Theo, how very slight her knowledge of Gerald was, and his of her. No wonder, indeed, that her relations disapproved of her doings. But it was too late now ; too late even for delay, when neither of these young people agreed with her in seeing any reason for it. Colonel Forester laughed a little at

his wife's anxieties ; he liked Gerald, and was sure now that everything would go well.

“ He is a gentleman. He's not one of your digger fellows ; she is not throwing herself away,” he said consolingly.

“ She would never have done that,” said Mrs. Forester. “ I should not be afraid if they were not going to that savage place. She is the strongest spirit, Arthur, and that ought not to be.”

“ You are a little hard on Kimberley ; they say it is improving.”

Mrs. Forester shook her head ; she would not be comforted.

Gerald and Theo were married in the cathedral at eight o'clock one morning, and stayed with their friends to the service afterwards. It was the quietest wedding ; no one was there but Colonel Forester, his wife, and the faithful Combe. A young officer came as

Gerald's friend, who had met him accidentally in Adderley Street, and remembered him in his army days.

Theo was not in a dream that morning, as she had been at Helen's wedding so long ago, when she woke up to find Gerald looking at her. She was not the brilliant beauty she had been then, lovely in satin and flowers, holding her head very high, and looking out scornfully upon the world. Things had changed indeed; she had gone through a good deal since then, and she was beginning to know that life was a subject for patience, not scorn.

Yet, perhaps, she was more beautiful now; a little pale, a little sad, in the plain white dress she had brought with her, and her sweet face expressing, more than any other feeling, a perfect earnestness. There were no half-measures with Theo; she had once given

herself to Gerald, and therefore she belonged to him, and she had not hesitated to follow his fortunes. After they were married, he looked at her anxiously, for in all his happiness he was almost frightened at what he had done. She was so beautiful, there was such a proud grace in her gentleness; and what sort of life would she have to lead now? But she looked up at him with a light in her eyes which reminded him of that day in the cloister at Locarno, and he began to know that in her less demonstrative way she was as happy as himself.

Later in the day they drove off in a cart to Wynberg, Colonel Forester having undertaken to see that Combe and the luggage went safely by railway to the same point. The day was not very hot, though the sun shone brightly; Theo still wore her white gown, and they were sheltered by the head

of the high two-wheeled cart. Their Malay driver sat in front, wearing a blue coat and a great straw hat, like a pyramid.

Her few days in Cape Town had accustomed Theo to the sight of Malays and black people. They, in their lazy picturesqueness, with white teeth for ever laughing, and decked out with bright-coloured handkerchiefs, seemed to belong quite rightly to the brilliant sunshine and black shadows, the enervating softness of the air, the gorgeous fruit and flowers which heaped the market and the little stalls by the roadside. Every one here seemed to be playing at life, playing at work, not living or working. Gerald said it would be an awful thing to live at Cape Town, but Theo was not so sure. In the strange mixture of her character there was something that understood the feeling of the lotus-eaters, and she was a little tired and

languid after the summer just ended, which was going to begin again for her.

The black people looked up and laughed at them as they drove along. Other carts drove by, with jingling bells, and the people in them put their heads out and laughed too. They met waggons drawn by a long team of mules, which plunged and kicked, and were as lazy as the natives; long whips were cracked, and there was a great deal of shouting. Beyond all the dirt, and noise, and colour of the town—they had to drive through the Malay quarter—Table Mountain rose dark and sombre, with clouds about him, and the Lion lay watching, and misty mountains far away looked soft and blue.

Then they drove on through a wind-swept country, with straggling trees all blown one way, a sandy tract between the mountains and the sea. White sails were flashing away

on the blue water, and the waves were breaking on white sand. Beyond this, they came to low white villas in shady gardens, with agapanthus growing, and other strange, solid-looking flowers that Theo had never seen. Then on past vineyards, where handsome Malays kept little fruit-stalls by the roadside, then through a shady road where the sunbeams glinted softly through the thick twigs of budding oak-trees.

At one place they came to a bridge with a stream far down below, where some Kafirs with red handkerchiefs on their heads were beating clothes on stones. Gerald and Theo reminded each other of the washerwomen at Locarno.

“But I was wretched when I saw those women, for I hadn’t got you then, and now I have,” said Gerald. “So I like this better than Locarno, and the blackies better than

those good Swiss. Don't you? Wouldn't you rather be here?"

The question hardly seemed to want an answer.

"I don't know why any one should ever be afraid of Africa," Theo said presently.

They were both silent, and looked round. Certainly in no country could the sun shine and the air breathe more sweetly; crickets, if not birds, were singing all along the sides of the road, which ran now red and sandy through tall dark pine-trees. Presently this perfect peace was disturbed by meeting a Malay fish-cart tearing along the road with hideous noises on a horn made of seaweed. As this instrument passed away into the distance, it was like a fog-horn at sea.

Then came silence again, and presently they turned into a shady lane, and then into a long, quaint avenue of willows; then

crossed a bridge over a stream, and stopped in a wild garden at the foot of a flight of broad old steps. These led up to the "stoep," a kind of raised terrace or balcony, in front of an old Dutch house, with white rough-cast walls, and a roof of thick dark thatch.

There were flowers everywhere : all along the stoep stood pots of flowers ; down below, by the bank of the stream, was a hedge of blue plumbago ; roses and geraniums, just coming into flower, grew in wild clumps and masses all about. And the sun shone over it all, and everything seemed to lie quietly basking, while the crickets sang loudly, and the water flowed with a gentle swirl ; and Combe, the only creature who was not quite happy there, came forward from the open door to receive her mistress.

The bride had kissed her that morning

when she had done dressing her—a difficult task with eyes blinded by tears.

Theo knew very well what was poor old Combe's chief trouble, how she felt that this African business was her fault, just as much as Lady Redcliff's. If she had had a little more courage, a little more faithfulness! But all the reproach came from herself, none from her mistress, who was only more gentle and considerate than ever.

"I wish this was home, Theo, after all," Gerald whispered to his wife, as he brought her up the steps. "The house at the Fields is very different, you know."

"Don't talk about it now; let me love this," said Theo.

They went into the hall, with its brown polished floor and panelling, and then into the rooms that opened from it on each side, all cool, quiet, dark, with Venetian shutters

closed. There were flowers on the tables, on the deep window-seats—everywhere. The drawing-room was the least attractive room in the house, for it was furnished in an English upholsterer's fashion of a few years ago, with an elegant suite of blue damask; but the drawing-room did not affect the happiness of these people much.

That day began a little idyll in their lives; they both believed that nobody had ever had such a honeymoon before. The wildness, the remoteness, the newness, the touch of adventure in the whole thing, the doubts and difficulties through which they had made their way to each other; all this, real as it was, gave life a wonderful feeling of romance. Of course they had done a very foolish thing; Gerald knew that, when he allowed himself to think for a moment, for he was more prudent and less high-spirited than Theo;

but she was so calm and fearless about the future, that he almost ceased to fear it for her, and the untroubled peace in her eyes made him too happy to be anxious. After all, they could not have lived away from each other. What did a few little outward hardships matter, compared with such a heart-break as that?

They talked a great deal about the past and the future as those short sweet days flew by. It was rather delightful to find that, after all, they knew so little of each other, and had such endless discoveries to make. Every day was more beautiful, more dream-like, than the one before it, and every day there were more flowers, and the sun was warmer, and they found some new charming corner about their old house and garden to waste the hours in. It was only for a fortnight. Theo forgot that it must ever end,

giving herself up to the languid charm of those long afternoons. Gerald was more restless ; all among those rose thickets he was haunted by the thought of a barren, treeless land, with dust-clouds blowing, and he grudged every minute of that golden time at Wynberg, which must so soon be left behind.

They used to sit for hours on the grass near the stream where the roses grew, and the blue plumbago hedge looked like a fairy wall to keep the world out. Then they would stray on a little further to a delightful sunny slope where strawberries grew, and they were quite young enough to care for strawberries. On more energetic days they would wander on through a shade of pine-trees, out upon the flats, where they could see misty mountain-ranges far away, and the low ground was covered with wild flowers. Theo found a

lovely arum growing in a puddle, and dreamed over it for some minutes before she called Gerald, who was gathering heaths for her a few yards away.

At night the Southern Cross and all the stars shone down upon them as they sat out on the stoep, and the crickets sang, and the flowers were sweeter than in the daylight; and so time went on till the last evening came, and they sat there talking about Ada. Gerald was explaining how he had left her money enough for a year; he was a little surprised to find that Theo knew as much about Ada's arrangements as he did himself.

"Since last spring," said Theo, "she has belonged to me as much as to you, remember."

"I believe that was why—I believe you like her better than me," said Gerald, laughing.

“She deserves it more—don’t you think so? Seriously, though, I think it was a pity she did not come out with me. The child can’t be very happy left alone at Mrs. Keene’s.”

“Well, I don’t know,” said Gerald, feeling that he did not particularly want Ada just now.

Theo looked up with a smile in her eyes.

“You don’t know!” she said. “Selfish, jealous, grasping! I know that I should like to have my dear little Ada, and if Kimberley is not much worse than this, and if you seem likely to make your fortune there, we will send for her in the spring.”

“Not much worse than this! Dear, you don’t know what you are talking about,” said Gerald dismally. “You idealise things in a wonderful way, but that will be beyond your powers.”

“Then why are you tired of being here,

and anxious to stop there?" asked Theo quietly.

"How can you say so!" exclaimed Gerald, astonished.

"Don't I know? You are beginning to find it all monotonous—flowers, and strawberries, and everything. Now, I could stay here in a dream of perfect peace—till it rains."

"It is not monotonous. I hate the thought of leaving it," said Gerald earnestly. "I know I shall never be so happy again. But it must end, you see; it's ended now almost; and at the other place there's lots of work and life going on. I'm afraid I'm not lazy by nature, Theo. I suppose you are."

"Never so happy again!" repeated Theo in her low, dreamy voice. "Is that what you feel? As for me, I mean to go on being happier and happier. What does it matter where one is, after all?"

Gerald somehow had not any words for an answer to this.

“And do you really think I’m going to make my fortune?” he said after a time.

“Why not?” said Theo.

“Listen, darling. I’ll tell you something. I don’t know whether you will forgive me. The man who lent us this house—he is a banker there, you know, and he knows more about that part of the country than most people—he told me, just before I started off to meet you, after I had bought the house and settled everything, that he believed this company of ours would turn out a complete failure. He says it is much too soon to think of building decent houses at the Fields. In another twenty years or so, when the railway has got there, so that the cost of transport is not quite so enormous, it will be a different thing, but at present it is a speculation that

won't pay. In fact, he made me very sorry that I had ever had anything to do with it, for it is like most of Clarence's affairs, you see—it doesn't stand on its own feet. A good many people will be taken in, and then the smash will come. The directors may get something out of it, or they may not. Now, you see, Theo, I have brought you out to this. I can hold on to this concern, or I can throw it over, as you please. I don't want to go back to England; I don't feel as if I could now. But, do you see, there was not time to stop you. If there had been, I don't know—— Are you sorry?"

Gerald told this story in rather a disjointed manner, with many stops, in a low voice in the starlight.

Theo was not sorry. She made him understand that.

"No wonder you are restless. Why didn't

you tell me before?" she said. "I think you must throw it over. But what can you do?"

"He offered me a temporary clerkship in the bank," said Gerald, half-ashamed. "But of course I must write home first; I can't settle anything yet. There is another resource which might make life worth living at Kimberley. You will see when you get there."

"Diamonds—like Mr. Lee," said Theo. "I don't think I like that, Gerald."

"Well, don't let us talk about it any more now. If you forgive me for bringing you to such a country and such a life as this, I don't care about anything else. Do you—do you really?"

"You didn't bring me; I came," whispered Theo. "And it is my country and my life, Gerald."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE JOURNEY.

A FEW years ago, when Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Fane went up from Cape Town to the Diamond Fields, only two hundred miles of the distance could be travelled by railway, and the whole journey was an affair of about ten days. Of course the railway journey was at first very much like others, except that the train was crowded with noisy, picturesque Malays. These disappeared by degrees, and after passing the Paarl, with its oaks, and vineyards, and long street of old Dutch houses, they found themselves slowly climb-

ing, going deeper and deeper in among the mountains.

They wound in and out between great gray rocks like castles, with here and there a green soft valley, which would be dark and gloomy, filled with deep blue shadows, as the sun sank lower, and the rocks and hills above were bright with gorgeous colour. Then night seemed to come suddenly, and the moon shone over the wild, weird, lonely mountains with an almost golden splendour, and the train went wriggling in and out of tunnels, turning sharp corners, with narrow valleys far below full of mysterious darkness.

Two days of this scenery, grander and more wonderful than anything Theo had ever seen, seemed like a fit beginning for this journey, which was altogether the most glorious fun that she had ever experienced. All the wild spirit of adventure, which had

had no outlet in England, began to find its use and its satisfaction here.

The Karoo, the great rocky plain, when they reached it, was not quite so interesting as the mountains—bare, rugged, stony, with scrub bush and dry sand. Sometimes they passed a group of Kafir huts, with dogs and children sprawling about together, and women washing in the pools of a dry river-bed.

At last, on a moonlight evening, they came to the place where the train stopped finally, and they were still several days' journey from home, as they called it.

"Now I'm afraid the disagreeables will begin," said Gerald, as he took Theo and Combe out of the little wayside station.

"No ; you mean the fun," said Theo, with delight in her voice.

"Combe doesn't think so," said Gerald.

And Combe, grasping her bags and baskets,

from which she would not be parted, could only groan in answer.

She was tired to death, poor Combe ! She could only see the terror and awfulness of the mountains, the desolation of the plain. She was afraid of the Kafirs, and thought the black must come off when they touched anything ; the discomfort of the inns, the strangeness of the food, made her feel ill ; she was sure that neither she nor her mistress would ever escape alive from this dreadful country. Every mile further from Cape Town made her more miserable, for Mrs. Forester's servants had given her a terrible account of the Fields. Even the train, that relic of civilisation, must now be left behind.

If Combe had disliked travelling in Europe, what was that to this tearing on into savage lands, as they seemed to her, with no pro-

tection but this wild young man who was now her master ?

It was a strange scene ; the rough railway-sheds, the encampment close by, with wild black figures moving round the yellow blaze of fires, or straggling up to the train. There were lights about the railway, a great puffing and whistling, a rolling of carts that came to take the passengers on their way. Not far off were one or two white houses with lights glimmering, and ox-waggons outspanned in front of them ; but all this was a little oasis of noise and life in the middle of a great stretching plain, over which the moon shone calmly for miles, a world of perfect stillness, scattered over with rough bush and heaps of stones, and bounded by a solemn chain of mountains far away.

The inn was very dirty, very comfortless, not much more than a canteen, so that it

was with great difficulty they got a room to themselves; but they were too happy to care; they laughed together and made fun of it all. After a very rough supper—but they knew what it was to be hungry, and did not care for that—they went out for a stroll by moonlight on the great plain. It was not actually so flat as it had looked from the railway, and a few hundred yards took them beyond a rising ground, out of sight of houses, station, railway, Kafir huts, and every sign of life; they were alone together in that silent country, under the African moon and the stars that she made pale.

“I wish it could be all like this. This is worth living for,” said Theo, as they wandered slowly on. “Away from all those people—those passengers, what a noise they made! All day I have been wishing for something

like this. Oh, Gerald, it is so nice to have nobody else—you and I, and nobody else in the world!”

“You don’t think it is a dream, do you?” said Gerald.

“I don’t care what it is. I only know it is perfect. How could you run away to this glorious, beautiful country, and leave me behind?”

“Sometimes,” Gerald said, “when I was coming down to meet you, I used to walk off like this by myself, and wonder if it was possible that I should ever have you with me here. It’s very hard to believe it now—now that I’ve got you. Yes, I think it is rather grand, there is so much more room than in England; but it is a dreadful country too, Theo, in some ways. Man is vile on this continent, my dear child, that’s certain.”

“Now I should think it was so easy to be good here,” said Theo. “Don’t you see, in this great still world, there is so little between us and the angels. In England there is hardly one bit of desert country to look straight up at the stars. There is no room for anything one doesn’t see. One’s thoughts are all tied down—houses, and servants, and crops, and fashions, and all the details that people make such a fuss about. Here they are all nothing. Life is simple, and grand, and perfect. Gerald, I think you and I are most gloriously fortunate. Do you know, it is the sort of thing that I have dreamed about. If only I had Aster, and could ride straight away to those hills! Look at the hills, Gerald—the white light over there. I think the angels are coming over them now.”

“To meet you,” said Gerald.

It had indeed a wonderful, spiritual beauty,

that vivid glory of night, which seemed to tremble on the hills, as if something unearthly was passing over them. Theo gazed away into the distance with dreamy, entranced eyes. Gerald's arm was round her, and he stood looking down into her face while she dreamed and talked in her low, gentle way. Presently he kissed her, breaking the spell suddenly, and bringing her back from the hills and the angels.

“Think of me. I want you,” he said.

“What else am I thinking of?” said Theo.

He made her walk on, and told her about two horses he had seen at the Fields, which he meant to buy as soon as they got there. Theo was very eager about the horses, and talked about nothing else, till, after a long ramble, they came back to the inn, and fellow-passengers, and dirt, and smells; but, in

spite of all this, they could not manage to be miserable.

The next morning they started again on their journey in quite a new way, which delighted Theo more than any experience she had had yet. Gerald had made acquaintance with the chief engineer of the line, who had consented to take them and their luggage on in open trucks, over some miles of railway which was not properly made yet, only laid down in a temporary sort of way for carrying material. Sitting on a plank laid across the truck was not exactly comfortable; but who, except Combe, could think of comfort under such circumstances! The wild excitement was positively glorious, of rushing through the air at express speed along a half-made railway line, with the great open plain stretching all round, and bushes covered with brilliant

flowers here and there, and the hills pale blue, shining in the distance. Farther on they went, tearing through a country of more trees, with railway camps here and there, and wild-looking Kafirs in blankets, staring at the train. They had one long stoppage in the middle of the day, where an engine had gone off the line—no wonder!—and a crowd of Kafirs were working about it lazily, ordered by white men. Gerald and Theo wandered away, and sat down among the rocks a little way off, watching them. Presently she made him come down among the tents and talk to the Kafir women. Some were stalking along with pails of water on their heads, some sitting at the hut-doors, playing with their funny little dark children. They looked up and laughed, and stared at Theo as she walked about among them. They

did not understand her, till she tried to comfort one poor thing who was sitting crouched up with a sick baby in her arms. The soft, soothing words of pity, though they were English, seemed to belong somehow to a universal language, and the woman lifted her sad eyes with a sort of gratitude.

After that, they climbed into their truck again, and steamed off in a great hurry, for the afternoon was closing in. It was bush country now, dull and lonely, till, by-and-by, it was lighted up with great burning clouds of smoke from bush-fires. Here and there the fires were quite near the line, and dark figures moved about in front of them. As night came on, Gerald made Theo lie down on the floor of the truck, and covered her with rugs, for it was cold; and so through the dusk they

went rushing on to the end of their railway journey—a funny little Dutch hotel, with waggons and oxen and mules about it, and railway-works going on, and the bush looking still more dismal under the rising moon. After that long, rattling, tearing day in the open air, they did not want a moonlight walk, and Theo's dreams were not likely to be waking ones. In spite of the room—in spite of the Dutch bed—in spite of the noises in the house, she went to sleep instantly, and slept in perfect peace till three o'clock in the morning.

Then they were roused by the loud blowing of a horn, and half-an-hour later, after drinking hot coffee in the kitchen, they had scrambled into the cart, and were off—another new kind of travelling. The cart was covered with canvas, and fitted up with five or six seats, one behind the other all facing the horses.

On the box sat the half-caste driver, a wild-looking fellow, who had enough to do to manage his team of eight, some horses and some mules ; beside him were two other men, one acting as guard, the other carrying the long whip, which flew out, cracking and flourishing at the horses' ears ; the luggage was strapped on behind. Gerald had secured the seat behind the box, which was the least cramped, and the easiest to get out of ; and so they started in the morning moonlight, dashing along through the bush, jolting, bouncing, plunging, while the three men in front sang together and the other passengers growled or joked in the background.

That was a curious journey. They outspanned often to change the horses, but very seldom where the passengers could get proper rest and food. It was impossible to sleep in the cart, however tired one might be. If

exhaustion made eyelids drop, and brought a momentary forgetfulness, some rut or stone, a tremendous jolt and bump, was sure to wake one up again. Now and then they stopped at a little farm or inn by the way-side, with orange-trees and oleander coming into flower ; but here two hours' sleep in some horrid little room was all they had ; the horn blew, and the coffee was swallowed scalding, and off again over the great desolate plains.

Sometimes they came upon a very picturesque scene — moonlight, perhaps, which made the wide plain look still more boundlessly mysterious, and a Kafir ox-waggon outspanned near the road. All the oxen, with their long horns, lay in a great dark circle ; near them a fire was burning ; red and yellow flames and a great waving column of smoke, rose slowly up against the blue, deep sky,

and the dark figures of the Kafirs sat round the fire, with their black arms outstretched, singing wild songs to the moon in their soft melodious voices.

At every outspan Gerald and Theo wandered away from the cart, taking their provisions with them, into the lonely silence of the veldt. These rambles had a charm of their own, which made them look back afterwards on those days of the cart as some of their happiest days. There were not many flowers to be found, for this is a barren country—ice-plants, and iris, and among the bush a shrub with bright red flowers, a sort of azalea; most of the wealth and luxury of wild flowers had been left behind near Cape Town.

One evening, when it was getting dark—it is dark very early there—they had a long, delightful rest near a pool, with frogs ringing

their bells, and crickets keeping up a wonderful concert in the bushes. They had a rug with them, and a heap of stones to lean against, and presently Gerald went to sleep there in the twilight, and Theo sat dreaming and thinking about last year, and London, and her grandmother, and the wonderful way in which her life had changed, so that now she was married, and in Africa, and—she told herself, as she turned her head a little, and looked smiling at Gerald—the happiest woman in the world.

The most civilised place they stopped at in this journey was Beaufort, where there really was a little refreshing rest to be had, though only from late in the evening till two in the morning ; but it comforted poor Combe, especially, to see gardens and trees once more, and to hear the sound of running water. Then on again, and away over the

bare country. Outspans were very frequent, for the team was poor and the road was bad ; but though these were waste of time, and generally happened where there was no chance of food or sleep, they were the hours of the day that Gerald and Theo enjoyed most. Their companions in the cart were of a rough kind—Dutch, Germans, Jews, men and women going like themselves to the Fields, and, like themselves, human beings—but this was the only point of contact. It was always a relief to get away from their grumblings and their coarse jokes, only less repulsive than their politeness.

One night there really was an adventure. They had been getting on very slowly all day, had had only one meal, and when night fell they were still some miles short of the farm where they hoped for supper and a few hours' rest. The cart came to a stand-

still in the middle of the veldt; the horses were taken out and fed for the night, for they could go no farther, and the passengers were informed that they must sleep in the cart or nowhere. Combe resigned herself to her fate; she had made a little friendship with a fat German woman, who was a stranger and unhappy, like herself. Wedged in between this woman and the side of the cart, Combe had reached such a pitch of resignation that she was fairly contented. Her master and mistress had wandered away by themselves, as their manner was. It might be necessary to come back presently and sleep in the cart, but a little peace and fresh air and loneliness must be had first, so they went off together in the moonlight with rugs and biscuits, to look for these in the great blue plain. They sat down under the shelter of a bush. Far off they

could see the fire that the driver and his friends had lighted, where they were boiling their kettle ; the voices, and the crackling of the wood, came softened by distance through the quiet air.

“I want to stay here all night, Gerald,” said Theo. “We can’t go back to the cart ; those Jew men are too horrid.”

“What, here, out of doors ?” said Gerald. “No, I can’t let you. It will be too cold.”

“But do you know that all my life I have longed to sleep out of doors ? And I may never have another opportunity. Before I left London, I told Hugh how much I should like it, and he was shocked — but he is so very civilised, dear old fellow ! Soldiers must do those things, though.”

“They don’t like it, and they don’t think it proper for ladies,” said Gerald. “There

are very few people like you, besides, thoroughly right-down romantic—liking the real thing as much as the idea. The way you have gone through this journey is wonderful to me. Yes, Captain North would never—— But you are not miserable, after all!”

“How silly you are!” said Theo softly.

She knew that there was always a little bitterness in Gerald’s thoughts of Hugh. It was not to be wondered at, perhaps; but Theo meant it to be driven quite away in time. These two should be friends some day, she was resolved; at present that end seemed a long way off.

“I will not spend the night in that cart,” she said. “But to satisfy you, dear—— I see a house.”

She had been gazing for some minutes across the plain, which was like an en-

chanted vision, lit up with the glory of the moon. Not very far off there seemed to be a dip in the ground, and beyond that there were trees, and certainly among them there was a faint white glimmer, where walls and windows might be. Theo stood up, and shading her eyes with her hand, as if in the sunshine, looked long and earnestly at this oasis in the plain.

“Yes, it is a house,” she said. “Come, let us go and ask them to take us in.”

“I don’t know what to make of it,” said Gerald. “If it was a likely place at all, we should have outspanned there. I’ll go and ask Tom the meaning of it.”

“No, no ; let us go and knock at the door,” said Theo ; so Gerald threw the rugs over his arm, and they set off across the veldt. It was a rough, scrambling walk ; they had to cross a sluit, a dry river-bed, among heaps

of stones, and then to climb up its steep bank on the other side ; and then they were soon close upon the trees and the house, a poor-looking little building, with one or two sheds about it, all very bare, with an iron roof that glittered in the moonlight, and blue gum-trees and orange-trees growing by the door. All was very still ; there was not a sound of life, not an animal about the place, except a dog that barked and growled inside when Gerald knocked at the door. He knocked for some minutes perseveringly, for he thought that even the floor of a room would be better for Theo than the cramped cart, or the open veldt at this time of the year.

“What do you want ?” said a man’s voice suddenly inside the door.

It was a pleasant voice, with a good English accent.

“I want a night’s lodging for my wife and

myself, if you can kindly give it us," said Gerald.

"Where do you come from, and where are you going?"

"From Cape Town, and we are going to Kimberley. We have outspanned down there across the sluit, and the cart is a bad place to sleep in. You are an Englishman; you will help us, won't you?"

"Sleep out in the veldt; better people than you have done it," said the man more roughly.

"It's rather cold," said Gerald, He looked laughing at Theo; it was impossible to help it; they were so like beggars at this inhospitable door.

"Go and be stifled, or go and be frozen, whichever you please!" said the man. "I won't forward you on your road to Kimberley. Do you know what will happen to you there?"

“What do you suppose will happen to us?” said Gerald.

“You will lose everything you have, your children will die, your wife will take to drinking, you will follow her example, and by-and-by she will sober you by going out of her mind. Don’t say you have had no warning.”

He raised his voice, so that it rang out angrily. The effect of the words were strange and awful in that lonely place, where they could not see the speaker, and everything round them was silent and still. It was like one of those terrible voices that used to be heard in the desert, as legends tell us—voices of evil spirits, driving lonely travellers mad with fright. Gerald and Theo stood there in the shadows, while the moon shone, and the mountains glimmered, bounding the vast plain far away. They looked at each other,

and both had turned a little pale. Then suddenly, inside the house, a woman screamed violently once, and began to sob and moan. They heard the man with slow and heavy steps go away from the door.

"Come away," said Gerald, laying his hand on Theo's arm.

This certainly was not the place for a night's rest. They hardly spoke till they had left the dark little group of trees and buildings behind them, and crossed the sluit, and were out again on the wide veldt, where they could see the fire burning, and the horses moving about in the moonlight, and the long canvas cover of the cart, which suddenly looked like home.

The cheerful blaze of that fire was very attractive; there sat their wild, good-humoured driver with his friends, still boiling the kettle in a yellow glow of light which made the

moon look pale. Most of the passengers had stowed themselves away in the cart; they were all in their right minds, as far as they had any. Gerald and Theo sat down near the fire, and Gerald began asking questions about the farm they had just visited. The men laughed at the notion of asking for anything there. They said that the people who lived there were English, and had ruined themselves at the Diamond Fields. The man had told his own story, as Theo had at once guessed. His wife was raving mad now, and constantly trying to destroy herself; he kept her there, alone in that house, and never allowed any one to come in. As Theo listened, sad and silent, to Gerald's talk with the men, a sort of terror stole over her for the first time; she felt the awfulness of this great country, where evil was so strong and human beings were so helpless and weak.

Presently, as she sat dreaming there, leaning against a stone, Gerald laid a rug over her to keep her from the cold. And then the men began to sing a wild, melancholy song with a chorus, which went on through many verses. And then she knew that Gerald was wrapping the rug more warmly round her; and she half opened her eyes, and saw the yellow flames flickering, and was conscious of a great blue roof, with a light in it, and she fancied that she saw two great white misty wings floating, even higher than that, and she murmured to herself, so that the words just reached Gerald's ear, "God is strong."

And then, strangely enough, she was in London, in her grandmother's house once more, with the lamp burning dimly; and she was telling her grandmother about Gerald; and Lady Redcliff kissed her, which

was a wonderful thing, and said, "My pretty Theo!" in her kindest voice; and Theo laid her head against her knees, but they were very hard.

And so they camped out that night, and she slept still and peacefully with her head on a stone, and Gerald sat all through the hours watching her, till the fire was nearly out, and they were all roused to bustle and confusion in the chill of the early morning.

As they started off for the Fields, with a great blowing of horns, and kicking and plunging, dashing recklessly down into the sluit, and up the other side, Gerald and Theo looked at that Englishman's lonely house—they passed quite near it now.

"Poor things!" Theo whispered to Gerald. "I wish we could have gone in and comforted them."

He looked at her and smiled; it was a woman's wish; and he knew, better than she did, how common such stories were in Africa. She would, indeed, find many to be comforted.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AT THE FIELDS.

DUST everywhere, and a hot, brooding, lurid atmosphere, which makes strangers to Kimberley, in spite of themselves, think of other and older "cities of the plain." The town lies irregularly about a low hill; it is surrounded by the great barren veldt, which stretches away for miles to the mountains, and is covered with rough scrub-grass, or sometimes it is all sand and dead brown stalks. The nearest green place, where trees and gardens are to be found, is Barkly, by the Vaal River, twenty-four miles away. Here,

where the first diamonds were found, the Fields people go to get rid of their fevers, or at least to refresh themselves after enduring their own climate a little too long.

There may have been changes and improvements since that time ; but when Gerald and Theo arrived at Kimberley the town was built of corrugated iron, with mud huts and canvas tents here and there ; the streets, or roadways rather, were a wilderness of dust and holes ; the place, in fact, was a mere settlement round the great mine, which was still worked by private claim-holders. Companies had hardly begun to be formed. Each man worked for himself, was lucky, sold his diamonds to the Jew dealers, lived wildly and extravagantly till the money was all gone ; or was unlucky, worked on in despair till he could afford to work no longer, and ended perhaps in starvation or suicide, while, by no

means rarely, the diamonds which would have saved his life and made his fortune were carried off from the mine by his Kafir labourers, hidden in their mouths, or even in a slit in their skin.

In those days the fortunate sorter carried his diamonds home to his wife in his waistcoat-pocket, and she looked them carefully over, and put the white ones into a little bottle of acid on a shelf, for fear they should crack in cutting. Here at Kimberley people thought of diamonds, talked of diamonds, searched for diamonds from early in the morning till late at night. Thousands of Kafirs, possessing no clothes but an old scarlet jacket, which they generally did not wear, spent their days digging out soil in the mine, which was sent up in buckets to be pulverised, and washed, and sifted, and sorted ; this last part of the work was always done by the owner himself.

All this interested Theo extremely when she first came to the Fields. She was in a mood to like everything, and everything amused her. She found things to admire, things that she said were beautiful, while Gerald laughed again at her idealising power. She saw new effects of colour, where he refused to see anything but dusty gray and brown; the purple-blue of the heaps of soil about the mine, the dark staging and machinery standing up against a faint yellow sky shading into blue, the red road running along into the town, the yellow green of the grass, the yellow huts of a Kafir location, with black figures moving about in red coats, blue coats, red caps; sometimes a wild Kafir in an orange blanket, with beads round his neck. She liked to see the ox-waggons, gaily painted, outspanned in the great open square of the town, the long-horned oxen meekly waiting,

the dark faces of many nations passing by, the coolies selling fruit, the Malays in their gaudy dresses driving or sauntering by. There was a romance about it all for Theo, in spite of the dust, the bad food, the enormous dearness of everything, the Jew dealers and the diamonds; but just now life itself was romance.

She had declared to Gerald that their own house was a great deal nicer than she expected.

"What did you expect, then?" he said rather dolefully.

"Oh, an iron thing," said Theo. "A shed, with two rooms. How many rooms has this? Four, and a kitchen, and a tent. No stairs! How nice! A garden actually, with trees in it. And it is all really our own!"

"I bought it and the furniture, as it stands," said Gerald. "If you had not come I should

have sold it again ; or perhaps have found some fellows to live with me."

He looked at her with laughing eyes, as she stood in the middle of the drawing-room. His wife—his house—it was all like a dream ; and there was Combe in the background, casting anxious looks round her ; she, too, though she would not have confessed it, was agreeably surprised at the house, which, at least, looked clean.

Poor little house ! Theo often thinks of it now, and never without a strange ache at her heart, and a disposition to tears. If happiness was short-lived there, it was very real while it lasted.

Outside, the house was corrugated iron, with canvas stretched over the roof to keep the heat away. All along the front, a reed-fence divided it and its little compound from the road. There was a deep porch before

the door, with a green creeper climbing over it; through this one went straight into what they called the drawing-room, which was the whole front of the house, except a little room on the left, called the study. This opened out of the drawing-room by a corner door, and so did the dining-room, a long little room behind; through it again was a bedroom, a sort of lean-to, with a sloping roof, looking out at the back on a row of blue gum-trees which divided them from their next-door neighbours. Then there was the kitchen, a tiny hole which opened out of the other end of the dining-room, and here was the only fireplace, except a stove in the corner of the dining-room. As there was no other room of any sort, Combe had to sleep in a tent outside in the compound; this frightened her a good deal at first, but she was not really a coward at heart, and was soon quite

proud of her tent, which she made into a smart little abode.

She was thankful to have reached some sort of home at last, and not displeased to have full swing for all her talents, which were many. She went out marketing, she cooked, she swept and dusted; she set herself to upholsterer's work, and made covers for the chairs and sofa out of some chintz that Mrs. Forester had advised her to bring from Cape Town. The canvas walls, the canvas ceilings, looked bare and ugly enough, but they had bought some photographs in Cape Town, and Gerald hung them up, with one or two little favourite pictures that Theo had brought with her. Then he and she had a few books, and these made the rooms look homelike, and after all, it was home.

Gerald had a little office in another street, where his building company was supposed

to give estimates, receive tenders, and do all its business, which on most days was no business at all. His chief occupation, therefore, was writing letters to the promoters of the concern in England, warning them how very poor its prospects were. If his pay was no more certain than the profits, this was, indeed, a bad look-out for him; but before throwing it over altogether, he wished to give some other man time to come out and take his place. His friend the banker, who had taken a fancy to him, would give him a temporary clerkship at any time. This was all very well, and might keep off starvation, but it did not prevent Gerald from feeling very uneasy.

He had no capital at all; Theo had her few thousand pounds; there had been no settlements—an additional cause of grief and rage to Captain North and Mr. Goodall.

Thus they could do what they liked with their money as long as it lasted; and when Gerald looked about him at Kimberley, and saw how men doubled their fortunes there, all his thoughts began to turn one way. The prudent old banker strongly advised him against having anything to do with diamonds, holding up many instances of ruined men. Still Gerald was attracted. He had a certain turn for speculation, and though no venture of his had ever succeeded, yet there seemed to be no reason why he should be unlucky always.

He said nothing of this to Theo; at this time they found money talk perfectly uninteresting. It was only Combe who complained to her of the terrible price of everything, on which Theo laughed, and said that everything was so bad, it ought to go a great deal farther. They were not sure of

much more than three hundred a year. Gerald had provided for Ada, and had spent almost his last money in buying the house, and horses, and fetching his wife from Cape Town. Theo was not at all anxious, arguing that she would want no evening dresses, and failing to realise, at first, that their income was about equal to a hundred and fifty in England.

On one of the first days, she had waked up from a peaceful afternoon sleep, and was looking out of the window, expecting Gerald, when she saw Mrs. Lee coming up to the door. She hardly knew her; the little woman was so very much changed in appearance. All her misery was left behind on board ship; she was very smartly dressed, very lively in her manners; she came laughing into the room, and insisted on kissing Theo, who bent her head with a shade of reluctance.

“Poor little thing!” she reproached herself; “why am I so horrid? It is very nice of her to want to kiss me.”

And she immediately began with extreme kindness to ask after Mr. Lee and the baby.

“Oh, we’re all flourishing, thank you,” said Mrs. Lee. “As to you—dear me, how queer it is to call you Mrs. Fane!—you don’t look as if you liked it much. You’re a lot paler than you were on board. Ah! I’ve heard more than one say that it don’t answer, coming out to them. It’s more than they ought to expect. Is that it now? Or is it the journey that’s been too much for you?”

Theo looked at her in a sort of dreamy surprise. There came vaguely into her mind at that moment a piece of advice that Mrs. Forester had given her, when they were talking about people and life at the Fields. This

advice was: "Give yourself airs." It had amused Theo rather at the time, for she had sometimes found that her character at home was that of a young woman whose airs were insupportable; but it was true that since her engagement to Gerald she had changed very much in this respect. The old airs, no doubt, were somewhere not far off; but she felt gentle and charitable towards everybody, and not at all inclined to show them. She and Gerald had talked a little on the journey about these things, and had agreed that they would be very friendly with their neighbours, though not absolutely intimate with them. Theo had, of course, thought of Mrs. Lee, the only one she knew, and was quite prepared to be kind to the little woman; but then she had pictured her unhappy, and appealing to her kindness. It must be confessed that this flush of prosperity, which made the poor little thing ten

times more vulgar than she had been on board ship, had a chilling effect on her friend. Theo began to perceive that Mrs. Forester's advice was based on good sense, and not on prejudice or worldliness, as she had imagined at the moment. She ignored all Mrs. Lee's questions, and answered, smiling :

"I am very well, thank you. Of course, the climate tries one rather."

"I should think it did," said Mrs. Lee. "You've got to be careful about fever, every one says, and this is just the time of year for it. So don't you go doing wild things—stopping out late, or going out too much in the sun. I expect you're one of those people who don't half take care of themselves."

"It would be very horrid to have the fever," said Theo.

She sat there, slender and pale, and dressed

in gray, in the corner of her sofa, while Mrs. Lee, bolt upright, and in very bright colours, went on chattering. Her black eyes went roving round the room ; sometimes they were fixed on Theo, with a curious scrutiny of everything she had on. She talked about the fever for some time ; then about the people she already knew at Kimberley—they were very jolly, she said : about the stores, and the shocking dearness of everything ; about houses and furniture, inviting Theo in rather triumphant tones to come and see her house ; then about dress, a subject in which she was quite at home ; and now she began to gaze rather anxiously at Theo's gray gown.

“ There's one thing we can do here at Kimberley,” she said : “ we can dress. I tell you, some of the ladies here are as smart as if they'd come out of a London fashion-

book. I'm awfully glad after all, that I brought some good dresses with me. You know, on board, I was ever so sorry. But I find people here are very particular. They take notice of you according as you're dressed. It doesn't do to be a scrub, just as if you were travelling among savages. You came out here to make your fortune, and you must look as if you were making it. You don't mind me saying so, do you, Mrs. Fane? Because, you see, I've been here longer than you have, and so of course I've learnt the ways."

"Yes," said Theo. She looked very quiet, very indifferent, lifting her eyes towards her visitor with a sort of idle sweetness.

Mrs. Lee was not at all conscious of the feelings she was exciting; but Gerald, who came up to the porch at that moment, and

caught sight of Theo's profile, pale against the shadows, thought that it was a very long time since he had seen her look so cold and scornful.

"She has got a visitor she doesn't like," he thought. "Who is it, I wonder? What a bore!"

He was rather uncomfortable in his mind as he turned away, and went in at the study window. He did not like the people himself, but he got on pretty well with the men, and was nervously anxious that his wife should be popular among the women.

"She needn't show in her face that she despises them, poor wretches!" he thought. "They will never forgive her, and we shall suffer for it in the end. It is partly Mrs. Forester's fault."

"Then you are happier than you expected

to be?" said Theo gently, dropping the subject of dress.

"Oh yes, I'm happy enough," said Mrs. Lee. "It's a beastly place, of course, but there's a lot going on. And I always did like, you know, to be in a place where there were more men than women; you get made such a jolly fuss with. And I've had several diamonds given me already; and George likes his partner, and they are having very good luck to begin with. Oh yes, I'm not sorry that we made up our minds to come."

There was only a thin partition between the drawing-room and the study; the door, too, did not shut particularly well; therefore Gerald had the advantage of hearing these last remarks. He thought he had better go in, and relieve Theo; it was evident that this lady would rather be entertained

by him than by her; besides, the mention of George's luck interested him rather.

So he went quietly into the room, and Theo introduced him to Mrs. Lee, who jumped up, and shook hands enthusiastically. He certainly would not have known her again, though she well remembered her glimpse of him at Cape Town. He talked to her, and she was quite contented to chatter to him, while Theo listened, happier now that he had come in; since Mrs. Lee's arrival, she had for the first time felt a little despair about Kimberley.

They talked chiefly about diamonds, a subject that did not at this time interest her very much; she found herself dreaming as she sat there in her corner, and gazed out through the dark shadow of the porch into the dusty sunshine.

Mrs. Lee's black fringe had now become

curly ; it bobbed over her sparkling eyes as she talked with great animation to Gerald, telling him the whole history of her husband's speculation. A distant cousin, whom he had never seen, had been working out here alone for a year or two, and had written to George that he had better come out, and buy half his claim. George had never done any good in England, as his wife candidly stated. He wanted at first to leave her and the child behind, but she would not hear of that. On board ship she had certainly repented, but now she was glad she had come ; George and his partner had found so many diamonds, worth so many hundred pounds ; of course the expenses were great, but the profits were evidently going to be splendid. Mrs. Lee pulled out her purse, and shook out several rough diamonds, laughing, on the table.

“Rather valuable property to carry about like that,” said Gerald, as he took them in his hand, his brown face looking grave and interested.

“Bless you, we think nothing of them here!” said Mrs. Lee.

She looked from one to the other for a minute in silence, while Gerald examined the little stones.

“You’re not a judge of them yet, Mr. Fane,” she said, “but you soon would be. I’m quite sharp about the different kinds already. Well, now, you won’t be angry, either of you, if I say something?”

Gerald looked up for an instant and smiled; then his eyes went back to the diamonds.

“I don’t think your wife will be offended,” said Mrs. Lee; “I know her better than you. Well, now, society here is very curious

about you two. They have often had young men of your sort, of course, who have run through their money at home—I beg your pardon, I didn't say you had—but Mrs. Fane is rather new, and they don't know what to make of her. And they can't understand why on earth you should have brought her out here, if it wasn't to make a fortune for her. As to that company, you know—I can tell you they shake their heads over that."

Gerald bent his head a little lower over the diamonds; he did not know what to say, and was conscious of the scorn in Theo's face, of a faint angry flush that might have shown Mrs. Lee she did not quite understand her.

"It is very kind of 'society' to be curious about us," she said, "but we are not at all interesting; there is no mystery about us, and I hope it won't trouble itself any more.

It is possible, I suppose, to live at Kimberley without wanting diamonds?"

Mrs. Lee was quite quick enough to feel her friend's indignation, and she coloured scarlet.

"Well, now, you must forgive me," she said. "Of course, none of us would be your equals in England, but it's a different thing out here, you know; we're all very much on a level."

"I did not mean that," said Theo, still coldly and haughtily. "I have no doubt the people here are very good people, but I don't see why our affairs should interest them."

"They are most thoroughly kind people," said Gerald.

"That they are, and so you'll find them if you are in any trouble. I could name two or three, Mrs. Fane, who will be as kind to you as you were to me on board ship."

Theo smiled a little at this. There was something frank and affectionate about the little woman, in spite of her vulgarity, which made it impossible to be very angry with her.

“I hope I shall not interest them by being in any trouble,” she said.

When Mrs. Lee was gone, Gerald came back from the gate, and found his wife walking restlessly up and down the room.

“Do you suppose we shall have all this impertinence over and over again?” she said. “But you don’t mind it, evidently. You rather like to be pitied, and wondered about, and interfered with.”

“No, I don’t,” said Gerald, flinging himself on the sofa. “Look here, though. I told you what it would be, and we agreed we would be friendly with them all—don’t you remember? And they are not ill-natured,

Theo—just the other way. You had much better let them like you. Of course they will if you'll let them. There is sense in what they say. Every day I see we ought never to have come here, if it wasn't for diamonds."

"I hate diamonds; I will not hear of diamonds," said Theo.

There was a cloud on his face as he sat and looked at her. She wandered about the room, and they were both silent for several minutes—the first unhappy minutes that either of them had passed since they were married, just a month ago.

"Poor child!" Gerald said at last in a low voice. "It was awfully wrong; I ought never to have brought you here."

"Oh, Gerald, forgive me!" she said, and she turned round suddenly, and came to him with tears in her eyes; so that their first attempt at a quarrel did not succeed.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

DIAMOND-DIGGING.

THIS was the only little cloud, except clouds of dust and clouds of flies, which troubled Theo's happiness at that time. These, with Gerald, were to be preferred to the clearest and purest atmosphere without him. This nonsensical remark was gravely made to him by his wife, not long after they came to Kimberley. Gerald laughed, and made some affectionate answer; but these outward discomforts plagued him more than her. He did not mind the people much, or the moral feeling of the place; but he did mind the

dust and the flies. However, he said nothing about going back to England, and Theo did not breathe a wish on that subject. He shrank from the thought of her relations, and he knew that either paying work or paying speculation would be more out of his way there than here. Of course he saw that, as an unmarried man, he could have got on here as well as many other young fellows; the first horror of the place had said that he could not, but now, on further acquaintance, he began to perceive that he could; and he had moments of sincere repentance for bringing Theo here—if not, as Mrs. Lee said, to make a fortune for her. But Theo was so brave, and happy, and patient; he knew that in her dear romantic mind she really meant that silly speech about the dust and the flies. When he came in anxious and desponding—for his spirits were variable—

one look into her sweet face was enough to bring hope and courage back again, and every day she seemed to be a little happier, a little more contented, as fresh interests began to spring up round her.

There were no more small bursts of haughtiness about the people at the Fields, who did not, in fact, trouble her much ; her own looks and manners protected her, unconsciously to herself ; and after that first visit she could smile good-humouredly at Mrs. Lee. In the next house to theirs, separated from them by a rather melancholy row of blue gum-trees, a digger's wife was slowly recovering from fever. She was a gentle, sad woman, with a good deal of refinement, and Theo spent many hours with her ; the poor thing's one longing wish was to go back to England, and not to let her children grow up where they were, wild little Africanders. Theo often carried

them off to her own house, and played with them there, for the sake of giving their mother an hour's peace ; but she had a great tenderness for children, and a great influence over them. After two or three weeks, the next-door neighbour and her family went away to Barkly for change of air, and then Theo's chief sympathies were called out by a Kafir woman with a sick baby, who used to sit nursing it at the door of her hut, wrapped in a scarlet blanket. The tiny dark face grew yellower and smaller, and more pinched and ghastly, and Theo watched it with a sort of superstition, till one day it was gone, and its poor mother crept out alone from the hut, and looked up at the sun, and round at the desolate camp, and wandered along moaning like an animal in pain till she came to Theo's door, where she crouched down on the ground, and Theo brought her food and tried to comfort her.

Another friend that Theo made at this time was a dog, a funny red beast, the colour of his native dust. The old banker, Gerald's first friend, gave him to her, and he and she soon loved each other faithfully. Wool would have looked scornfully upon such a rival as Toby, whose only external beauty was in his honest, loving eyes.

The only people at the Fields with whom Theo and Gerald were really likely to make friends, if they came across them, were a few young Englishmen among the diamond-diggers, who had left civilisation behind and come out here : some under various kinds of clouds, some only for adventure and fortune. These young men lived here and there at Kimberley, often two or three of them together, dressed in the wildest garments, and spent their time in hunting when they were not sorting diamonds. Gerald did not make friends with

any of them at once, for circumstances had made him shy and reserved; he had not the common interest of diamonds, and Englishmen are much the same in their manners everywhere; but he knew several of them slightly, and Theo began to know them by sight, as they walked about the town, and used to say to him sometimes: "There goes a gentleman."

One day he and she had walked up to the edge of the great mine, and were standing there, looking at the work going on. It was a curious sight, and has often been described before, but this was what Theo saw. She looked down into a hole in the earth, like an immense bowl, with steep sides, more than two hundred feet deep, and an extent of some acres. The floor of this was all uneven, dark-blue soil, divided into great irregular blocks, like rocks in an old crater.

Each of these blocks was a "claim," belonging to a separate man or company, and about each of them a number of Kafirs were working, thousands of small black figures altogether, looking tiny in this immense place, half hidden among the platforms, and terraces, and ditches, and the strange shadows of the mine. They were all at work, though lazily, all these little figures; and the air, as one looked down at them, was full of vibrating wires, making a faint sharp music as hundreds of buckets came up along them, full of blue soil, wound up by many windlasses, and running down again empty to be filled with soil once more. There was a strange medley of colours in the sides of the mine—red, yellow, blue, all running into each other; the sun was low, so that one side all glowed with the deepest hues, while black sharp shadows lay across the other.

It was while Theo and Gerald were looking down on this, standing a little apart from the windlasses, and the buckets, and the Kafirs busy with carts, taking away the stuff to be dried, and washed, and sorted, with a rough-looking white man here and there directing their operations; while he was telling her all he knew about it, and speaking, perhaps, a little enthusiastically—for the whole thing had a strong attraction for him—while they were absorbed in the picture before them, a young man, who had just come out of the mine, stopped and looked at them curiously.

“More picturesque than our old mines, isn’t it?” said Gerald.

“Yes; but I like our old mines best,” said Theo. “Last year, at Woodcote, I thought they were so very interesting.”

Gerald looked at her smiling, and she laughed and coloured a little.

“Don’t be presumptuous,” she said in a low voice. “Why should I have been thinking of you? I mean it. I think there is something fine in our men going down into the darkness and the dangers, risking their lives every day that all the houses may be warmed. They want some courage; they and their work are much more romantic really than Kafirs and diamonds, if you think of it seriously.”

“Well, all this is more romantic on the surface, at any rate!” said Gerald.

“Ah, but what is romance?” said Theo.

She was looking happy and exalted as she spoke; her eyes dark and soft, her face with a faint pink flush under her white shady hat, were lovely and full of expression.

The young man from the mine, who had been lingering near them with furtive glances, now approached so close to them that Gerald turned round and looked at him.

He was roughly dressed, and in his shirt-sleeves, with a slouched-hat on his head. He was short, with a light, active figure, looking as if he could walk, and ride, and play games. His skin was tanned dark brown, and the hair on his head was dark, but his beard was a light tawny colour; the sun had bleached it. He had bright pleasant gray eyes, and was about Gerald's age. There still lingered about him something of the air of an Eton boy, good-humoured, polite, idle, and charming.

"I think you have forgotten me," he said to Gerald, and he took off his hat to Theo with a pretty deprecating smile. "No wonder, but this opportunity is too good to be lost."

"Why, you are Bob Stirling!" said Gerald, seizing his hand. "He was in the regiment," turning eagerly to Theo. "Bob, this is my wife."

"I supposed so," said Bob, "since I have been lying in wait here three long minutes. Are you making a tour in Africa?" he asked, as he shook hands with Theo, who smiled on him brightly. "Is Mr. Fane going to write a book about us? I wish somebody would."

"Oh, no; we are living here," said Theo.

"What on earth——" began Mr. Stirling, and he stared at Gerald and was silent.

Bob Stirling was by nature curious and talkative, but he asked no more questions then. He did not even say much about having unaccountably lost sight of Gerald after he left the army; he only said one or two nice things about their old friendship, and told him he was not changed in the least.

"I can't say that to you," said Gerald. "I may have passed you in the street fifty times—most likely I have, for I came here in June."

"I should not have passed you," said Bob. "You are wonderfully well preserved, but now you will let him grow his beard, Mrs. Fane, and then it will be all up with his good looks, and the old associations."

"Oh no, never," said Theo.

"How is it, then, that we have not met before?" said Gerald.

"I went down to Cape Town in June, and came back in August, and had the fever, and have been on the Vaal River ever since, picking up again. I only came home two days ago. You and Mrs. Fane have not had the fever? A pleasure to come."

He went on to tell them very frankly all his concerns. He had left the army two years

ago, being one of a large family, and finding his pay an empty delusion, he had come out here with two of his friends—Slater and Cumming.

“You remember Slater—fat boy—he’s thin enough now, poor beggar! awfully cadaverous, always having fever. He’s got it now.”

They had been working hard, and on the whole had had wonderfully good luck.

“In another year I shall be rich enough to go home, and stay there,” said Mr. Stirling.

“Don’t you think it will be very funny to live in England again?” said Theo.

“Yes, but on the whole I shall like it. I’m not naturally savage, in spite of my appearance, which I never felt ashamed of till now.”

After a little more talk, Mr. Stirling

remarked that it was sorting-time, and asked Theo if she would come and sort for him.

"You will bring me luck, Mrs. Fane, I know," he said.

So they walked across with him to his ground near the mine where his partner, Mr. Cumming, a dark, silent man, was already sitting at a table, with Kafirs and buckets in attendance, and heaps of waste blue soil in the background. The Kafirs rolled their wild eyes on Theo and Gerald as they came up. Mr. Cumming moved away from the table, rather terrified at the sight of a lady; he was not such a sociable character as his friend Bob, and he had no former acquaintance with Gerald Fane.

"Now, Mrs. Fane, sit here, please," said Bob, and Theo took her place on a rough stool behind the table.

It was a strange scene; the great sky that blazed with evening light, the groups of black, degraded-looking figures standing round, the dryness, the desolation of red sand and blue crumbling soil, without a tree or blade of grass to be seen; the two young diggers, with shirt-sleeves turned up on arms as brown as their faces, Mr. Cumming talking to Gerald a yard or two away, and Mr. Stirling standing by Theo with laughing eyes, to preside over her first attempt at sorting.

A Kafir with a most repulsive face came forward with a large sieve of blue stuff, and poured it on the table before Mrs. Fane. Bob Stirling put a piece of slate into her hand, to shovel the stuff about with, and she began her sorting.

At first the stuff seemed full of sparkling things, over which she exclaimed, thinking

that each of them was a diamond. Gerald now came up and looked over her shoulder with eager interest, though he had often helped at sorting before. The deceptive sparkles came from bits of spar, or from crystals, which were not at first so easily distinguished from diamonds, till Bob Stirling put them between his teeth; if they felt breakable they were worth nothing. In the end Theo's sorting produced about a dozen diamonds, and two of these were large, fine ones. The diggers were much pleased, saying it was the best sort they had had for some time; they begged her to come and sort for them again as soon as she would, for a lady was always luckier than a man.

“Perhaps, if you will come, Mrs. Fane,” said Mr. Cumming solemnly, “there may be a chance of Stirling attending to his business

a little more. He's the idlest fellow; he leaves it all to me, and if I wasn't the soul of honesty, he would be ruined in no time."

"I must certainly come and look after his interests," said Theo, smiling. "He has been ill, so what could he do?"

"Have I really got a friend to stand up for me?" exclaimed Bob in a low voice.

He was perfectly happy with his new-found friends, and Cumming, who was lonely, looked rather enviously after him as he walked away with them.

Gerald and he were talking about old times, and Theo, listening to them, felt as if all this was a strange, incongruous dream. Both surely could not be real—civilised life in green, shady, cloudy England, where fields, and hedges, and gardens were, and all the thousand details—so unnecessary they seemed now — which took up every day; all that

felt so far off now, that Theo felt as if she could never, possibly, see it all again.

They passed along by crowds of Kafirs just come out of the mine, with scarlet coats and black legs, shouting, screaming, dancing. By the wayside sat the coolies, with their baskets of fruit for sale; rough white men lounged by smoking, with their hands in their pockets, wearing large hats lined with green; all was noise and colour in the deep, glorious glow of sunset.

Bob Stirling came and spent that evening with Gerald and Theo, and many evenings afterwards; he was so friendly, so helpful and good-tempered, that they never found him a bore. He brought his friends to see them, and very soon they had no want of acquaintances; all the best of the young men in Kimberley came to their house, and worshipped Theo, and made friends with Gerald.

Life was very happy. They went out riding on the veldt in the early morning, and by moonlight; the opinions of their neighbours did not trouble them, though it grew hotter every day. And after all, Gerald did not seem foolish when he said again that the only good reason for living here was diamonds, and that he thought he must buy a claim, and try his luck like all these other fellows.

Theo smiled a little indifferently, and said : " Well, as you like." She did not mind much ; perhaps she was drifting into that lazy, languid, don't-care state of mind, which seems to be one of the two poles of life in South Africa.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE EXPEDITION.

THE heat, and the flies, and the dust became more and more as the summer advanced ; and one day, when Gerald was complaining of them terribly, Bob Stirling proposed that they should go off for a fortnight's expedition into the country, to hunt springbok and shoot partridges and wild turkeys. " And Mrs. Fane would find some sketches about the river," he added, for he was a little of an artist in his way, and admired some drawings that Theo had made at Wynberg, and on the journey up, and at the Fields.

They both entered into his plan with great spirit, and began asking questions and talking about details, which were all at his fingers' ends ; but presently he hesitated a little, looking doubtfully at Theo.

"I'm the worst feature," he said ; "you won't want me—or would it be better if I brought another man? No, I don't think it would. I have put it into your heads, and now I shall leave you to carry it out."

"You won't do anything so unfriendly," said Gerald. "We were saying last night that you were as good as one's brother—so there, Bob! unless you don't want to come."

"Of course I want to come. Does he mean it, Mrs. Fane?"

"You knew him before I did," said Theo.
"I mean what he says ; will that do?"

Bob smiled cheerfully ; he was quite con-

tented now, and sat there looking gentle and happy, and talking about the expedition. Any colonial roughness he had was put on to suit his associates outside; he took it off with his hat when he came into Theo's house, and would sit for hours at a time talking to her about his mother and sisters.

"Till you came," he said to her one day, "I never mentioned their names to anybody here—not even to old Mother Jackson when she was nursing me in the fever."

The lady thus spoken of was rich and influential, and full of bustling kindness. She was an object of reverence, mixed with a little fear to almost all the younger and poorer people at the Fields. Mrs. Lee adored her; her curiosity had made Theo treat her with a dignity and stiffness which effectually checked her for the time; but Theo reproached herself

a little for this, when she heard all the young men talk of her so affectionately. "Old Mother Jackson" seemed to be their resource in every serious trouble. There were many stories of her generosity and her active benevolence; still Theo shrank from her, and did not wonder, somehow, that Mr. Stirling should have kept his own people sacred from the prying tongue of Mrs. Jackson.

The idea of getting away for a time from this city of the plain into silence, and freedom, and the open air, was perfectly delightful to Gerald and Theo. All the arrangements were soon made, and one glorious night they and Bob Stirling started away from the camp in a Kafir ox-waggon, which had been hired in the square, having come in a day or two before with a load of wood. It was a very smart waggon, painted green, with red wheels and pole, and a good strong canvas top. The

long team of oxen were in good condition ; their Kafir driver was a sturdy fellow, and Bob Stirling had known him before, having hired him and his waggon last Christmas for a hunting expedition with two or three of his friends. It is the habit among Kimberley people to go off in waggons in the summer time, but generally just after Christmas, when the heat is greatest, and they have a right to a holiday.

The long, pleasant picnic began that night by passing through the Kafir location outside the camp, where fires were burning, and black figures dancing and singing round them. The three friends were riding, for of course they took their horses with them. They had two black boys belonging to the expedition, to look after the horses, cook, and make themselves useful, and in the waggon they had provisions enough for a

fortnight. They rode on in advance of the waggon, which came winding slowly after them along the dusty road. The moon, low in the sky, shone softly over the great wide veldt, which was covered with a bush like juniper; there was a dim line of mountains far away, just as Gerald and Theo used to see them on their journey up. She looked away at them a little sadly now. Kimberley was soon left behind; even Kafir huts were left behind, and there was a great stillness around them. Once or twice they passed a mud farm in the veldt, with higher bush about it, and sometimes a few trees; sometimes these farms were ruined or deserted. Here and there a slight hill, roundly sweeping up from the plain, looked away to the other greater hills; here and there they scrambled down into a sluit and up again; but these were the only breaks in the wild, boundless plain.

There was not much likeness in this to the cart-travelling of a few weeks before. Now there was no crowd, no hurry, no early horn to wake the weary from their sleep, which was much pleasanter in the waggon than in a horrid little room of some wayside farm or canteen. Gerald thought the oxen dreadfully slow as they dawdled along, doing under twenty miles a day; but Theo was not at all impatient, even of the meals of oxen and darkies. At every outspan—and they were frequent—the black boys searched about leisurely for fuel, and made a large fire, and boiled their kettle, and made their tea—tea which Theo tried once to drink, but she did not repeat the experiment.

They were all very happy, though Gerald grumbled, and the other two laughed at him. Bob Stirling was enjoying himself thoroughly,

constantly finding queer subjects for Theo to draw, which reminded them oddly, afterwards, of various little adventures on that journey. And he had a wonderful way of taking himself off when he was not wanted, of riding off alone at a tearing pace for long stretches across the veldt, when the sun was too hot for these unseasoned English people. They had soon found out, of course, that it would have been better to have nobody, but they agreed that Bob was the best companion they could have had, for he was never in the way.

In the great sunshine of noon, Theo would lie half asleep in the back of the waggon, and gaze dimly through her eyelashes at the endless, burning plain. Here she first saw a mirage—trees, the high bush about a farm, trembling on the horizon: the narrow bright line between showing what it was.

The pleasantest part of their time was spent by the Vaal, the wide, calm river, with its red banks, and fringe of soft mimosa-bushes. Here they loitered for several days, camping-out, bathing, sketching. Early in the morning they would go out hunting springbok, little graceful creatures, with curly horns, and wild, soft eyes. Bob's horse would not stand fire, so he jumped off to have a shot at the game, and sprang into the saddle again and flew after them like the wind. Sometimes they went out for long rides by moonlight, and once or twice they lost their way, and had a very long round before they reached their camp again.

One evening they paid a visit to a Boer farm, which Bob knew already, about an hour's ride from where they had encamped themselves. It stood out in the plain, with purple hills not far off, beyond the stretch of glowing

sand. There were a few trees, and some bush, and some Kafir huts, grouped about the long low buildings; they were white, with dark thatch, and the farm animals walked in and out as they pleased. Here they rode up just at sundown, the hour when it is most dangerous to be out, and were received kindly and hospitably by the good Boer folk. The master of the farm himself was away, but his wife, and a row of sons and daughters, all stood with outstretched hands to greet the strangers, and presently made them sit down to a supper of salt mutton. Bob Stirling, who had visited them before, chattered Dutch to them, and perhaps told them a few romances about the other guests he had brought them, for after a time the Boer wife, who was walking about with a long whip, driving out the pigs and turkeys, turned to Theo, and said :

“ I understand. You are the daughter of the Queen of England.”

Theo laughed and shook her head, but all the sons and daughters nodded, and stared at her in solid solemnity ; and Bob nodded too, laughing ; and Gerald Fane looked smiling at his wife, who was evidently the centre of immense admiration. So that Theo's dignity was established in these good Dutch minds, and they all treated her and Gerald quite like a prince and princess, standing round and watching all their proceedings with grave eyes.

They had intended to ride back to their waggon in the moonlight, but when Bob and Gerald went out to see after the horses, great clouds were coming up in the dark sky, and by-and-by a tremendous thunderstorm broke over the veldt. The great cracks of thunder were like a battle of artillery close

by; the vivid flashes that flew from the sky ran in many colours along the ground; and then the rain came down, pelting, dashing, tearing sheets of rain. The horses stood trembling and frightened in their stable; animals and people crowded under any shelter they could find. Gerald came back to Theo, where she sat in the kitchen, trying to talk to the brightest-looking of the tall, square daughters of the house.

“No getting back to our camp to-night, Stirling says, you will have to stay where you are.”

She looked up at him with a little shiver. Even her love of adventure, which was very real, could hardly reconcile her to the ways and the odours of a Boer farm. After the freedom of the veldt, with its roof of stars, or the familiar shelter of their own waggon, she could not bear this close room, the smell

from its mud floor, the heavy thickness of everything in it, beginning with its inhabitants. And the good Boer wife, whip still in hand, came back from the outer door, where she had been looking at the storm, and holding a short conversation with Mr. Stirling. As she came she stumbled among pigs, and dogs, and poultry.

“Voet soek!” she said. “Get along with you!” and she shut the heavy door, with the torrent of rain pouring outside, and all her creatures within, and came to Theo, and taking her kindly by the hand, led her into the guest-chamber at the end of the living-room, which was very dark and very grimy, and had a mud floor like the rest, with an ancient smell hanging about it, suggesting the heavy snoring slumbers of the present Boer, his father, and his grandfather.

Gerald had followed them to the door, and as soon as their hostess had retreated, Theo turned to him in consternation.

"My dear Gerald, I shall be stifled. You don't imagine that I am going to sleep here?"

"I suppose you must; there is no help for it," said Gerald.

"But the heat, the stuffiness! No, I won't. What would you and Mr. Stirling do if you were alone?"

"We shouldn't stay, of course," said Gerald. "But Bob says it might not be safe for you to ride back now. It is so damp, you might get a chill, and get fever. So I think you must content yourself here for the night. It was a lucky thing that storm didn't catch us in the open veldt."

"My dear boy, I mean what I say," said

Theo calmly. "I am not in the least afraid of fever, or anything else, and I like these nights away from Kimberley, and I am not going to waste one of them here. Now I believe the rain has stopped, and the moon is beginning to shine. Go and tell Mr. Stirling that I want the horses to be saddled at once. Oh no; indeed I am not going to stay here. Now, for once, Gerald, you must let me have my own way."

"Is that anything new?" said Gerald, laughing. "Well, look here, these people will think you a capricious sort of princess; and I hope they won't be offended, but Bob must manage that. I'll go and tell him."

Half - an - hour later, as they rode away through the warm wet air, over the wide, moonlighted plain, all a pale steaming mist

after the rain, Theo laughed very gaily and triumphantly over her escape from that "gast-kammer."

Gerald agreed that it was almost nastier than anything they had met in Africa ; only Bob was a little grave, and pressed the horses on.

"Nothing hurts me, you know," he said ; "I'm not afraid for myself, and Gerald seems pretty tough ; but this atmosphere is awfully unwholesome for you, Mrs. Fane."

Bob had spoken a good deal more strongly before they left the farm, and had looked at Gerald with surprise, mixed with a touch of pity ; perhaps he thought that when he was married, his wife would run no foolish risks to please herself. His advice was wasted, but not forgotten. It was connected in Theo's mind, sadly enough, with her last day of real health and happiness in Africa—

that day when the ride to the Boer farm had seemed such a pleasant variety.

Two or three nights later, the waggon rumbled back again into the camp, past the Kafir fires outside, where the rhythmic dance was going on as if it had never ceased, gay, yet melancholy, to a dreamy song, with clapping of hands and graceful moving in time. The oxen made their way along the dusty, uneven street, and Gerald lifted his wife out of the waggon and carried her into the house. She was burning with fever now, and talking rather excitedly; most of the day she had been shivering under that tropical sun. Combe met them at the door; she was as white as a sheet, and seemed hardly able to drag herself along.

"Why, you are ill too!" Mr. Stirling said to her in a low voice; for Gerald could see nothing but Theo.

"A touch of fever, sir," said Combe; and then she looked up into the young man's face and smiled bravely. "I shall be well now," she said.

"You're a brick!" said Bob, still aside.

Theo's fever lingered on for many days; she was so weak that she could hardly move, and through the long days and hours she would lie gazing vacantly out at the blue gum-trees in the compound, with Toby at her feet. She never knew then of Combe's illness, for the good woman kept her word and got well, though she was terribly pulled down; but when Gerald was out of the house she never left Theo. Bob Stirling one day brought an addition to the household in the shape of a tall Zulu, called Adam, who was to act as cook and housemaid, and sleep with his head in the kitchen fire. At first, Combe regarded him with disgust and dread,

but she soon found out that he was a faithful dog, with many human talents added to his dog virtues ; so Adam established himself.

The weeks till Christmas passed slowly away. Mrs. Jackson, Mrs. Lee, all the kind women who were Theo's neighbours, and all the young men who were her and Gerald's friends, came constantly to see her, or to ask for her, or to bring her some offering or other. Mrs. Jackson's jellies were only rivalled by her next-door neighbour's soup. Theo found then what she might have guessed before—that Kimberley, with all its wildness, and rowdyism, and vulgarity, holds some of the kindest hearts in the world. She had hardly ever been ill in her life, and did not understand it, but she bore it very patiently ; her eyes used to brighten, and her cheeks flush when she heard Gerald's step outside.

On Christmas Day he carried her into

the drawing-room, to the funny old sofa there. She lay wearily watching the eddies of red dust that whirled about the camp, the coolie women in their white veils going to church, the Malays in their gorgeous turbans—all the varied figures of the strange place where she lived. Gerald came and sat down beside her, and she stroked his forehead and his hair with a very thin, white hand.

“Well,” she said, “how is your claim getting on? Have you had good luck?”

It was the first time that she had alluded to his new occupation. Just before their expedition, by Bob Stirling’s advice, he had bought a half claim from a man who was going home to England. All the arrangements, the machinery, the setting his Kafirs to work, the sorting, the paying, had been horrible bores while Theo was so ill; but Bob had helped him through everything.

However, not a single large stone had turned up yet. He brought out some small ones to amuse her, but she just glanced at them, and let them fall back into their little box again. He looked at her, and there were tears in his eyes in spite of himself; he took her hand and kissed it, and looked at it curiously, it was so thin.

“I am very sorry, dear; you must forgive me; it was all my doing,” she said. “Grandmamma always used to say that I should bring myself to a bad end by obstinacy. Do you know, Gerald, I have had such odd dreams all this time. Grandmamma has been with me a great deal, and so very kind. I wonder whether she ever thinks of me?”

“Of course she does,” said Gerald half indignantly.

“Yes, I know she does. Last Christmas

I was with her in the Square, and certainly never expected that you would have brought me here, you cruel boy! And the Christmas before was rather sad too — Uncle Henry so ill. He has been very dear in my dreams lately, and he and grand-mamma did not seem to hate each other so very much, after all. And Nell and Hugh——”

She shut her eyes for a minute, and Gerald was half-frightened, but she soon looked up again, speaking very gently :

“Will you do something to please me, as it is Christmas Day?”

“Anything in the world.”

“Go and dine with Mr. Stirling and the others, then. You didn't know, but I heard him talking about it last night. Combe and Toby will take care of me. I want you to go, dear.”

"I would much rather stay with you," said Gerald.

"I want you to go," she repeated. "And it is not good for me to have you here always; you make me a little feverish, Combe says; it is ridiculous, but I believe she is right. And it will be so nice to watch for you coming home again."

That was indeed a strange Christmas Day; but Theo was not so alone as she felt; the spirits of her friends who loved her were not very far off. The mail, a few days before, had brought her a long letter from Nell, and she had cried so sadly over it that Combe, coming in, had taken it away in a rage.

CHAPTER XXXV.

FAMILY COUNCILS.

“It is such a stiff letter ; it tells one nothing,” said Helen Goodall sorrowfully. “Only just saying that she is very weak, and the baby is delicate. And in my last letter I begged her so to tell me more about herself. All her letters since Christmas have been short and shakily written—and she has been ill, and Combe has been ill, and they have had a great deal of anxiety. And then for several mails nothing at all ; and then this scrap from Gerald Fane, just to announce the baby. John says she has brought it all on

herself, and that I think about her too much," said Helen with tears in her eyes. "Of course she behaved like a dear beautiful old goose, as she always was; but you and I can't forget our old Theo because of that, Hugh. I am sure I was cross enough at first to please anybody."

Hugh North sighed.

"She has not written to me for months," he said, "except once, in the spring, about selling out some money. I know how it is. All her money has been poured into that diamond-mine. No one had any control over it but herself, and there were no settlements. So nobody is to be blamed, I suppose."

"People sometimes make great fortunes out there, don't they?" said Helen.

"Gerald Fane won't," said her cousin. "Of course, though, we don't know. People are silent for different reasons. They may be

getting so rich that they can afford to cut their relations."

"Is that like Theo?" said Helen, shaking her head.

"It is not like either of them, I believe," said Hugh.

He had arrived from Scotland that September day, on his way back from a month's shooting with his friend Harry Campbell. He and Helen were now strolling about the Woodcote garden before dinner, waiting for John to come in. A small nursery cavalcade was to be seen in the distance—Master Goodall, fat and sleepy, in his perambulator; his little sister of two months old in her nurse's arms.

Helen herself was not changed at all; she looked as soft and pretty as ever, and was perhaps rather more lazy in her movements.

Hugh looked thin and worn, and much older ; he was burnt by the long hot summer, and his hair had a tinge of gray at the temples.

The second post that day had brought Gerald's short cool letter, telling Mrs. Goodall of the birth of his son. His wife wished them to hear of it, he said ; she would write herself when she was stronger.

All that evening Helen could talk of nothing but Theo. Hugh was in perfect sympathy with her. John was rather dry at first ; he had been very angry last summer with what he thought Theo's heartless ingratitude, as well as madness ; but even he could not help listening with interest to the talk of the cousins.

Theo had never said much in her letters about her life at Kimberley, yet Hugh was perfectly informed on the subject ; he had

read everything, had picked up every scrap of information about South Africa in general and the Diamond Fields in particular. All this was solely for his own satisfaction; but now he became suddenly quite a talkative man, and told Nell a hundred things that she wanted to know.

"Poor old fellow! it's quite touching, isn't it?" said Mrs. Goodall that night to her husband.

"I am uncommonly amused by the way he tries to make the best of it all," said John. "He won't even let me say that Theo did a foolish thing."

"He always thought her perfection, and he always will," said Helen. "He and I and Uncle Henry were the only people who ever understood Theo."

"What about her husband?"

"I know nothing about him."

“Well, you are very contemptuous ; but I always rather liked poor Fane,” said John thoughtfully. “Mind you, he was the last man to be weighed down with the anxiety of a wife and children.”

“I wish he was a bachelor again with all my heart,” said Helen.

Hugh North went back to London, and having written a short letter of congratulation to Theo, tried to find some interest in his daily life and work ; but the effort was a failure. He felt misanthropic ; he was both mentally and physically unwell, and suspected that he had overwalked himself in Scotland. The thought of Theo haunted him in a way that was becoming almost terrible to this calm, strong man.

If Helen was anxious and unhappy about her, what was he ? If Helen suspected that things were going wrong, that illness and trouble

had come to Theo, of which she told them little or nothing—and if he in his heart agreed with Helen, if his fears went even beyond hers—what could he do, what was his duty as Theo's most faithful friend? She had not kept her promise of writing to him, and telling him everything, but perhaps he ought not to wonder at that.

Then sometimes he told himself that he was a morbid fool, and that most likely Theo was too happy to remember him at all. Why should she want him? She had her husband, who, of course, was enough for her. From her earliest days, if Theo had one creature she loved, she wanted nothing more. Hugh tried to think of her faults; he wished to convince himself that she was fickle, and selfish, and indifferent, and forgetful; then he gave up the absurd attempt suddenly, and his anxiety about her became more

feverish than ever. It was too horrid to hear nothing, to be in this deep ignorance of anything but the bare facts of her life.

And then one day, walking in London, he found himself near Lady Redcliff's house, and it struck him as possible that Theo might have written to her grandmother.

He disliked Lady Redcliff heartily, but Theo, he knew, had always been strangely fond of her; and though they had quarrelled, he thought it not unlikely that they might write to each other now. The chance was not to be thrown away.

He went to the house, and as he stood at the door, he remembered the last time he had been there—that day when Theo sent him away. He bore her no malice for that, as she knew very well; but the recollection added a little extra stiffness and gravity to his manner when the butler took him upstairs,

and he found himself walking into the old drawing-room. He could not help giving a glance at the window where Theo used to sit, where she got up to receive him with her faint, weary, absent smile.

Some girl was there now; he did not at first see who it was, but not Theo—never again Theo, he thought, with a cold weight at his heart, and then he gravely shook hands with Lady Redcliff.

“This is funny! Who told you to come?” she said, looking at him sharply.

There she sat in her great chair, black cap and all, her eyes as bright as ever; the year and a half—or ten years, was it?—had not altered her in the least. Hugh, with all his coolness, was slightly confused by his reception. But as Lady Redcliff did not look savage, he smiled a little, and answered:

"I ought to have called long ago, but I have been out of town lately, and——"

"Don't apologise; I did not expect to see you," said Lady Redcliff. "Why have you come now? To inquire after Theo?"

"Well, I thought it possible that you might have heard from her. I suppose you know——"

"Miss Fane has been telling me that she has a nephew, and that I am a great-grandmother. She expected me to be pleased," said Lady Redcliff. "Do you know Miss Fane?"

"I beg your pardon—the room is dark, and I never thought of finding you here," said Hugh, turning to Ada, who rose up smiling from Theo's corner, though her eyes were full of tears.

On the table, between her and Lady

Redcliff, some sheets of a foreign letter were lying. Hugh's eyes fell on them, and then he looked quickly again at Ada.

"News from Africa?" he said, half under his breath.

"This bold child has ventured into the witch's cave," said Lady Redcliff in her most cheerful tones, "to bring a ridiculous rigmarole of a letter that came from her brother yesterday. What she did it for, I can't conceive, as she knows that Theo and I quarrelled mortally. I was just telling her that she ought to have gone to you."

"Please, Captain North, will you read the letter," said Ada, pushing it towards him, "and tell me if there is anything I can do?"

"Read it to us," said Lady Redcliff. "This girl does nothing but choke, and I can't pretend to read Mr. Fane's writing on that detestable paper."

Hugh struggled through the letter as clearly as he could. It did not read well; Gerald had written it in great trouble of mind, and under circumstances, poor fellow! that must have been very confusing. All the first part was a story of money difficulties; nearly all their capital was gone, thrown away in working that claim of his, which in all these months had never even begun to pay its expenses. Ill-luck had been with him from first to last; his Kafirs, no doubt, had robbed him, though nothing could be proved. Bills were tremendous, and could only be paid by sacrificing more capital. Doctor's bills were the most trying. Theo had been miserably out of health ever since the winter, with constant returns of fever; she had been away to the Vaal River, but the change had done her very little good. She was always nursing other people and fussing after them. Combe

had been ill, too ; he had been ill himself, and if his friend Stirling had not helped him, his affairs would quite have gone to smash. He believed that Theo ought to go home to England, but if there was no other reason against it, he did not see how they could possibly afford the journey. And now there was the baby, too.

“Everybody is awfully kind,” wrote Gerald, “and Combe has worked herself to death. At first I know they all thought Theo would not get over it, but she told them she would, and really it would be too awful to die here. This is the most dreadful place on the surface of the earth, and I think I should have gone mad long ago, if it had not been for Theo. If she dies, she knows what will be the end of it. And all the time luck may change any day, and one may find a big stone or two that will set everything

right. It seems foolish to sell the claim when that may happen to-morrow. We must try to hold on a little longer. The clergyman here is a nice fellow. We had the baby baptized at once, because he was so small, and called him after me—at least, his name is Gerald Hugh, according to Theo's wish. He is such a funny little chap, red all over. I am holding him at this moment, while Combe attends to Theo. He clenches his little fist, and looks very grave over it all. They say he is weakly; no wonder, I'm sure; and he thinks he might have come into a pleasanter world, I know, for he spends most of his time crying. I wrote to tell Mrs. Goodall of his birth, as Theo thought her people ought to know, and I believe by-and-by she means to write to Lady Redcliff, whom she always seems to have tremendous faith in——”

Here Hugh broke off suddenly, and Lady Redcliff laughed. Ada held out her hand eagerly, and took the letter ; there were only a few words more. For a minute or two nobody spoke ; then the girl looked at Hugh, colouring scarlet, and said, with a quiver in her voice :

“Of course you know I am perfectly helpless, and poor Gerald sent me some money in this letter. I have asked Mrs. Keene, where I live, to find me something to do. I would have done it long ago, but Gerald never told me of any difficulties. I can do nothing for him—but can’t you do something for Theo? Can’t we get them home to England?”

“We will,” said Hugh very quietly.

“Oh, thank you—thank you!” cried Ada, and she hid her face, and burst into tears.

“Good gracious!” exclaimed Lady Redcliff, with a sharp slap on the arm of her

chair. "This is unbearable. If you can't control yourself, go into the next room at once. It is quite enough to hear of a squalling baby in Africa."

Ada quieted herself suddenly, her blue eyes fixed on the old lady in open astonishment. Hugh could hardly help smiling.

"Yes ; sit in the corner and be quiet," said Lady Redcliff. "As to you, Captain North, you are as foolish as this girl. What do you mean by saying that you will bring these fools home to England? They must take the consequences of their folly."

"I don't think so," said Hugh in his gravest manner.

"But I do. Is it not very true, what the idiot says in his letter, that luck may turn any day, and he may be a rich man? What an amusing sort of trade it must be! Gambling, and nothing else."

“Theo can’t stay there,” said Hugh.
“Her health will be entirely ruined.”

“Don’t you suppose she knew that before she went? I warned her of everything that would happen to her. She didn’t care. She gave up health, position, prospects, everything in the world, even to her grandmother and her cousins, unnatural creature! for the sake of that man, simply, as I told her, because he had handsome eyes. Yes, Miss Fane—you need not mind my saying so. Yours are not at all like them.”

“She may have given up her relations,” said Hugh; “but they have not given up her. Something must be done.”

“Speak for yourself, please,” said Lady Redcliff. “What are you going to do? You can’t take Theo away from her husband. She wouldn’t come.”

“I must think,” said Hugh, looking down.

He feared and hated Lady Redcliff; he was very unhappy, deeply in earnest, and her sharpness did not amuse him. He felt that the next moment she might tell his dearest secret, if she knew it, to Ada Fane and all the world; and he had a suspicion that she did know it, from the mischievous tone of her last words, and the flash of her eyes that accompanied them. "If we could find something for Mr. Fane to do in England," he said presently, looking across at Ada, with a consciousness that Lady Redcliff was laughing at him.

"He thought it was impossible to find anything," sighed Ada. "But perhaps you could——"

Hugh looked down at his hat, frowning dismally. It struck him that he had better go away and think it over. This heartless old woman only made everything seem more

dreadful, and the poor girl could not possibly be any help. He was just going to get up and say "good-bye" to them both for the present, when Lady Redcliff asked suddenly :

"Are you ill, Captain North?"

"Perfectly well, thank you," Hugh answered stiffly.

"That's a pity," said Lady Redcliff. "If you were as ill as you look, you might get sick-leave, and make a little tour on the continent of Africa, by way of going to a healthy place."

Hugh lifted his eyes and looked Lady Redcliff straight in the face. She always had a mocking air, of course ; but somehow, just then she did not look quite so disagreeable as usual.

"What good could I do?" he said. "I am not well. I believe I could get an extension of leave if I asked for it. But

should I be of any use to Theo if I went out now?"

"You would like to see her!" said Lady Redcliff, with another flash of mischief; but before he had time to make any answer, she looked at Ada and said: "My dear, I think you had better go away now. Leave your letter with me, if you don't mind. I will send for you when I want you again—to-morrow or next day. Now I want to talk to Captain North alone."

She spoke quite kindly and civilly, and Ada, of course, at once obeyed. When she was gone, Lady Redcliff began to talk to Hugh in earnest.

"You and I have never been friends," she said. "I always disliked your family; you are good people, most of you, and I detest good people. Theo and I used to quarrel about you. What a temper she had,

to be sure ! I wonder if there is any of it left now ? ”

“ I hope so,” said Hugh drearily ; he did not much care whether Lady Redcliff liked him or not.

“ Yes, she used to stand up for you,” the grandmother went on, “ and her eyes used to be all on fire when I called you names. Well, my poor Theo ! Cousins are dangerous people, Captain North, and even now, in spite of all these misfortunes, I would rather she had married Gerald Fane.”

“ Do you know, Lady Redcliff, you are saying rather extraordinary things ? ” said Hugh, starting up. “ I may as well go. This African matter wants thinking about.”

“ Don’t be angry, my friend,” said Lady Redcliff. “ I was not blind, if Theo was, and you may be sure she never told me anything.”

Hugh turned white, and walked across to the window.

“Don’t go back to that old story now,” he said hastily. “Let me do something now. What shall I do? What were you going to say? I thought you had some plan in your head.”

“We will come to that by-and-by,” said Lady Redcliff. “The first question is, will you go to this dreadful place? Somebody must go, and I suppose I am rather too old.”

“Of course I’ll go,” said Hugh eagerly; “there is not much doubt of my managing that, I think.”

“Very well, only don’t get the fever,” said Lady Redcliff; “and understand this, you are going as a messenger from me.”

“I don’t quite understand.”

“Why, you foolish man,” she said very

impatiently, "what right have you to go out there and interfere in the affairs of these Fanes, and insist on putting an end to all that diamond-digging rubbish, and bringing them home in spite of themselves—what right have you? Less than none, I think, and so will Theo. Will she take money from you for her journey, for instance?"

"That is a detail," said Hugh.

"Rather an important one, you will find. No; you must go from me, and the sooner the better—next week."

"I will try what I can do," said Hugh quietly.

"Very well. Sit down; don't make me nervous, and read the early part of Gerald's letter again—not all that stuff about the baby."

At last, after a long consultation, and after telling him several old stories, among them that of her own early interest in the Fanes,

Lady Redcliff allowed her ambassador to go. He walked away from the house with new life and spirit; a strange unreasoning happiness had taken possession of his mind. Theo could not forbid him to go to her, and then he remembered how she had asked him to go, and how he had answered like a fool that he preferred civilisation. Where was the desert now, the wilderness, where life was not worth living—in Africa, or England?

CHAPTER XXXVI.

DARKNESS IN SUNSHINE.

A KILLING climate, failing health, and increasing poverty; months of daily suspense, and daily disappointment; a future that begins to have no hope in it, no light to lead one on, but only a darkness from which human nature cannot help shrinking; this state of things makes young romance grow old, so that its bright flame dies down into ashes and weariness.

Theo was not superhuman, and the chief thought in her mind that summer was, How is it to end? Not that she had lost

courage, for she would never let Gerald despair, and when she was most ill, mind and body both worn out with fever, some new strength had come to her, and made it impossible to give in and die. She could not leave Gerald alone there; she could not let him leave her behind, when some day the time came for him to go back to England, to that dear home country which she could hardly think of now without tears. One can easily understand why she wrote such short letters to Helen and Hugh; she could not bear them to know what sort of life she was leading. Sometimes she thought that some day, when she felt stronger, she would write a letter to her grandmother, and tell her everything; but that day did not come. And when she was a little better, Gerald always wanted her, or Combe was ill and must

be nursed, or some sick neighbour must be visited.

And now the baby had opened his eyes on this dry, dusty, dazzling world; and he did not like it, as Gerald told Ada in that letter, which would have vexed Theo if she had read it. He was the smallest, weakest, saddest baby that ever cried his first hours away; but he made his mother strangely happy; he was never out of her sight for a moment, and almost always in her arms. She thought he cried less when she was holding him, and bending her face over him; his dark, melancholy eyes looked up into hers, and she thought he could understand all the mysterious fancies that were in her mind about him, and feel all the love that was in her heart.

She did not see or know that the doctor and all the good women shook their heads over him, and was only a little amused at

the extreme gravity with which Bob Stirling regarded him when he saw him for the first time. She looked up smiling, puzzled by Bob's unusual solemnity.

"Do you think he is like anybody? Is he like Gerald?" she said.

"I don't know, Mrs. Fane. I suppose he is like a little angel," said Bob. "I'm awfully afraid Kimberley won't agree with him."

"But that is just what I think," she said, answering the first part of his speech. "He will be like Gerald by-and-by, but now he has only that solemn angel look, as if he saw such wonderful things that we can't see. He will come down to us presently, and forget them, I am afraid."

"'Trailing clouds of glory,'" Bob muttered, and then he coloured very much, and went away as soon as he could into the dust and the sun-blaze.

He walked off gravely to his sorting, thinking of something the doctor had said to him the day before.

He was very sorry for his friends. He could have afforded quite well to go home to England, any time this year, but somehow he could not bear to go, leaving them to sink deeper and deeper in misfortune; and he reproached himself now for having advised Gerald to have anything to do with diamonds. The poor fellow was unlucky—that was plain; even his wife's sorting brought no good fortune to him; he was known throughout the camp as an unlucky man, and he knew it himself, and was becoming a little desperate. Bob Stirling sympathised very strongly with Mrs. Fane, when she wished they were all away from Kimberley; he thought he knew even better than she did how almost necessary it was

for Gerald to get away ; but to Gerald himself that seemed impossible. Theo was too weak, and too much devoted to her baby, to argue with him much ; yet sometimes there were arguments in which, of course, neither of them convinced the other. Then Gerald was very irritable, and then penitent ; and Theo, perhaps, would make things worse by being a little proud and cold ; and somehow it was not only outward circumstances that made them both unhappy. He, perhaps, was the unhappiest of the two ; she did not think, as he sat and looked at her with little Gerald in her arms, what wild, despairing thoughts were passing through the poor fellow's mind. And a year ago, he and she both thought that one could have nothing apart from the other ! Now it seemed as if his one passion was for diamonds, hers for her baby. Was it possible ? Could little

Gerald really, in his innocence, be a sort of separation between his father and mother?

One day Gerald came home as usual, and walked heavily into the half-dark room. He was very thin, and worn, and sunburnt; his eyes were hollow; his digger's clothes looked rough and careless; he was tired and slouching, and half stumbled at the door.

"Take care, dear; you'll wake him," said Theo softly from the sofa.

Gerald muttered something, and flung his hat into a corner, and himself into a large chair at the other side of the room.

"Come here," said Theo; "are you very tired, poor boy?"

"Of course," he said; but he did not move; and presently she said in a low voice: "I can't come to you, because I don't want to disturb him; he has been crying all day."

“He never does anything but cry, poor little beggar!” said Gerald. “I wonder the doctor can’t stop that; it’s perfectly awful.”

“There might be things,” said Theo, “but Combe says they wouldn’t agree with him. He is so weak, you see—so delicate.”

“I believe Combe knows nothing on earth about babies.”

Theo did not answer; it was not worth while to defend Combe’s knowledge; but presently she asked the usual question:

“Have you any good news to-day?”

“I should have told you long ago if I had,” said Gerald.

There was a long pause, and then she said:

“I wonder how this will end, Gerald? A month ago, when I told you I could not keep him here when it was hot, you said

we must wait a month, and then decide something. I'm sure the heat is already bad for him. Mrs. Jackson says so—and, Gerald, she was here this afternoon, and she said he grew smaller every day."

Her voice failed, leaving a sort of sad echo in the room. There she lay on the large dark sofa, all white, holding her baby in her arms; his little face was pinched and wasted, his tired little eyelids were closed; he looked patient, poor tiny thing! but hardly peaceful or happy; it was only a few minutes' rest from the sorrow and pain that seemed to have belonged to him ever since he was born.

"Don't let her bother you; it is his nature to be small," said Gerald rather impatiently; and after a minute or two he added: "He's not so weak as you think. When I went off this morning, he took hold of my finger and held it like a man."

"Gerald, you are such a long way off. Do come here!" said Theo under her breath.

"I shall wake him if I do."

"Very well, I can't help it."

He came to her very gently then, and kissed her, and looked into the little sleeping face; and presently, in silence, went lightly back to his chair again.

"Sell it to-morrow, dear, and let us go away," she said.

"Ah, that's all very fine," he answered despairingly. "But what are we going to live on? And—look here—the man who buys it will have all the good luck. He'll find a big stone the very first day, and go on finding them, and make his fortune in a few months. And if he does, why shouldn't I?"

"Simply because you don't," said Theo.

“That is such nonsense. Of course it is despairing work—killing work, nothing but failure day after day—who knows that if I don’t? If it was a bad claim, there would be reason in what you say. But it’s a good one, as you know; the last fellow made his fortune out of it, so why shouldn’t I? One only wants patience.”

“Patience is such a dreadful thing,” said Theo, half to herself.

“How can you be so childish?” said Gerald, with a sort of groan, twisting himself in his chair. “I’m doing all I can, the best I can for you and him, and you won’t even wait to see what two or three months will bring.”

“Why should they bring anything more than the last seven, or eight, or nine?”

“Because they must. It’s impossible, it’s against reason that they shouldn’t. It would be madness to sell the claim now.”

"Madness!" repeated Theo. "Sometimes madness comes from staying here too long. Do you remember that farm, Gerald?"

He laughed.

"It depends upon you to fulfil that prophecy?" he said.

Theo sighed. After a few minutes she said:

"If the claim is such a good one, you would sell it well, and then we should be all right."

"It has a bad name now, you see," said her husband. "It certainly would not pay me anything like what I have spent upon it. Stirling knows it wouldn't. Everybody knows it would be ridiculous to attempt selling now. I must stick to it. I'm sorry you hate it all so desperately."

"Am I unreasonable?" said Theo.

She did not try to argue with him or

persuade him any more, for she was very tired. After all, she thought, as far as she was concerned, it did not matter much. She had lived through all these months of fever and wretchedness, and she would probably go on living; she was not afraid now that she would die. And if Gerald could ever be happy and fortunate, and could carry out what he had set his heart on, perhaps it did not matter that her cheek had lost its young roundness, and that her pretty delicate colouring was gone for ever, and that she looked and felt years, instead of months, older than the girl who had left England, full of eager, restless happiness, to join him in this country. No, it did not matter at all about her, but it did matter about the baby; the horrors of that climate, the dust and the flies which she had laughed at, became real horrors now

that they tormented him. She was uneasy about him, though perhaps not really anxious, for people had been too soft-hearted to frighten her. She could not bear the thought of her child growing up in this country, a boy like other boys she saw at Kimberley. She talked to him about it sometimes in confidence, for when she said these things to Gerald he was rather hurt and angry, and asked her if she really thought he meant to stay at Kimberley always.

After all, perhaps he was right in a certain way. He thought of the future, and was doing his best, as he said, for her and the child ; it was her duty, then, to try and bear the present for herself and him ; yet if Theo had been strong and independent still, if that climate had not had its fatal effect upon her mind and body, one can hardly imagine

that for any reason she would have consented to stay.

However, after that evening she did not say much more, and seemed more patient, and tried to smile and encourage Gerald when he came back day after day with the same sad story of failure. About this time she had another attack of fever, which left her very weak; and little Gerald grew lighter and smaller every day, and cried more than ever, when he could not lie in his mother's arms. When she was getting better she had a long affectionate letter from Helen, full of the charms and health and beauty of her two children. Theo would sympathise now, she thought. Theo took her own baby in her arms then, and laid her face against his, and wetted his poor little cheek with sad, hot tears which made him cry.

One hot afternoon, when she was better, but hardly strong enough to walk, Combe was obliged to go out, and left her on the sofa with the baby. She was alone in the house, except that the faithful Zulu was lying asleep in the sunniest corner of the compound, and Toby, the dog, sat with one eye open in the porch. Some Kafirs were holding one of their feasts just outside the camp, and there was a great noise of wild music, and singing, and shouts, and yells, which yet was not exactly a disturbing or discordant noise, as it floated in at the open door, and the windows with their Venetian shutters.

The mail-cart from Cape Town had just driven into the camp, and one of its few passengers, pale, worn, sunburnt, dizzy with the extreme fatigue of that long journey without pause or rest, asked his way through

the blazing streets to Mr. Fane's house. Toby barked at him violently, as he came up to the gate in the reed fence, and opened it. The dog then changed his mind, smelt at him and wagged his tail, with the instinct of some dogs for their master's relations. Hugh North steadied himself with one hand against the porch, and waited a moment, peering into the dark interior. He heard a low, moaning sound, and saw a woman walking up and down, with steady, measured steps, which yet sometimes seemed to fail and totter a little, as if she was almost losing command over herself.

As Hugh's dazzled eyes became used to the darkness, he saw that it was Theo, and that she had a baby in her arms. He thought there was something very strange in her look, and manner, and way of walking; and in that great heat he turned suddenly cold, and

shivered all over, and wished he had gone first to the mine to find Gerald Fane, and to hear how she was, instead of startling her by his unexpected arrival.

And yet how he had hurried to reach her ! how even the mail-cart with its frantic, dashing haste and bustle, which frightened ordinary travellers, had not been half quick enough for him !

He stood still for a minute, afraid to go forward or to attract her attention ; but she very soon saw him and came to the doorway with the child in her arms. Hugh looked at her, and saw in a moment every detail of that terrible change—so it was to him. Yet Theo was looking curiously brilliant that afternoon ; her eyes were shining with their beautiful brown light, her cheeks and lips were burning red. She smiled with pleasure as she met Hugh, and gave him her right

hand, and held up her face to kiss him; the touch of her hand and of her lips was like fire.

“Come in, dear Hugh; I am so glad,” she said. “Are you starving? Have you come from London to-day? Combe will be in very soon, and you shall have some dinner. Sit down; that’s Gerald’s chair, he will be so glad to see you in it. And how is Uncle Henry—and Nell?”

By this time Hugh had quite forgotten his fatigue, his hunger, in the inexpressible terror of looking at Theo and listening to her. It was fever, he felt sure—thank God, only fever!—which, of course, gave her the strength to walk up and down in that restless way. He was only thankful that she was not too delirious to know him. He sat down for a moment, as she told him, and watched her pacing up and down. Now and then

she bent her face over the baby and moaned a little; the baby lay quite still—asleep, he thought. He wished she would sit down, but hardly knew, at first, what to say to her.

“Nell is very well, thanks; she sent her love to you, and so did Lady Redcliff—at least I think so,” he said, trying to speak lightly. “And I saw Miss Fane before I left; she sent a number of messages. You see I have accepted your invitation, Theo. And where’s Mr. Fane? At his work, I suppose.”

She hardly seemed to hear his slow, gentle voice at all.

“I do wish grandmamma knew all about it,” she said, after a pause. “She would be very angry at first, but not really, and we might go abroad and forget it. Do you know—it is so funny—I sometimes forget where I am.”

"You were always rather absent," said Hugh. "But I must say, with a sun like this beating down on one's head, it would be difficult to ignore Africa."

Then there was another pause, a long one this time. He could not sit still; he began to wonder when her husband or Combe would come in, to relieve him from the awful strain of this meeting. As she paced up and down, he got up, and stepped forward as she passed him.

"Won't you be tired, Theo? Hadn't you better sit down?" he said, with a little of his old gentle authority.

She lifted her beautiful wild eyes to his face, as he stood close to her; then they fell again on her baby.

"He likes me to walk about; it sends him to sleep," she said.

"But he is asleep now," said Hugh.

“Fast asleep, my little child,” she murmured. “He is not crying now. Gerald says he always cries. But look at him, Hugh; did you ever see him so quiet and peaceful? He really is smiling; he looks as if he would never cry any more.”

She trembled and tottered a little as she stood. Hugh put out his arm to support her, and she leaned against him for a moment, pressing the baby closer.

“Oh, Hugh,” she whispered, “you don’t know what he is, or what things we tell each other.”

Hugh hardly heard what she said, for he, too, was looking intently down into the baby’s face. It was, indeed, a peaceful little face, white as marble, and motionless; and there was something on the tiny wasted features which might be called a smile. And as Hugh looked, and felt the mother tremble as she held

her sleeping child, there came into his mind the strange, solemn conviction that she had spoken the truth when she said that little Gerald would never cry again.

“My poor Theo!” he thought; but he kept himself perfectly calm, and, to make quite sure, he touched the baby’s little hand with his finger, and did not, by any start or exclamation, betray that the life was no longer in it.

“Listen to me, dear Theo,” he said very low and gravely. “I know you have been ill, and it is not good for you to stand and walk about so long. Now, will you sit down, and let me hold the baby, and walk about with him? You must not forget that he is my godson, Theo.”

She made no resistance, but let him guide her to the sofa, and let him take the child into his arms, and sank back almost unconscious on her pillows.

"Now he is in my care," said Hugh in the same low voice, "and you are to lie still and rest while I take him to Combe. Then I shall come back and talk to you."

He left her, and walked on into the dining-room.

"Combe," he said, "where are you?"

But there was no answer. Plainly, there was no one in the house but himself and Theo. He looked round him with a wild anxiety, not daring to carry the child back into the room where she was. It seemed to him that she was on the verge of brain-fever, and that a sudden shock might be terrible. How she was to be told he did not know; he did not dare to think. He saw another door, and went on through it into the bed-room beyond. There he saw the baby's tiny white cot, and gently laid him down. He felt the little heart, but it was

still ; tried vainly and hopelessly to call back the life that was gone. No ; little Gerald had found the world too painful, even in his mother's arms, and had gone back, a pure baby-spirit, to the peace from which he came. Hugh North's eyes were burning with tears when he turned away from him, afraid to stay too long, and met Combe at the door. She was rushing in wild amazement, for her mistress had told her that Captain North had carried the child away, and Combe, thinking that this was only a feverish fancy, flew to look for him. Hugh held up his hand to keep her quiet.

“It was over before I came,” he whispered.

He went back into the drawing-room, where Theo was talking to herself in low, sweet tones, rather indistinctly, moaning and sighing now and then. Hugh had forgotten all about himself ; he was now thinking of

poor Gerald Fane, and wishing to go out and meet him; but he could not leave Theo alone. Then quick steps came near the door, and a cheerful whistling, which silenced itself as they approached nearer, and then Gerald almost darted into the house, and sprang across the room to his wife, holding out something in his hand.

“There, what do you say now? Who was right, after all? Two big stones, the least of them over six carats! If you and he were strong enough, we would be off to Barkly to-morrow. I don’t care what I do, now that the luck has turned.”

He had knelt down beside his wife’s sofa, not seeing, in his eagerness, in that darkened room, that any one else was there. She put out both her hands, and laid them round his neck, drawing him close to her, and to Hugh’s intense surprise, she said very distinctly:

“He will never cry again.”

“What do you mean?” said Gerald.

“Ask Hugh; he knows,” she said.

But Hugh had sprung up from his chair and gone out into the porch; he felt as if he could not bear any more.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

BROUGHT HOME.

HUGH never knew, and could never be sure in his own mind, whether Theo had known that her baby was dead when he first arrived at the house. He was inclined to think so; but he had no time to puzzle himself about that till long afterwards. It seemed as if he had come to Africa only to have his heart wrung by saying "good-bye" to his cousin; for after the baby had been taken away from her, and Gerald, and Hugh, and Bob Stirling had followed him to his grave in the desolate cemetery—a place that Hugh

could never think of without an involuntary shudder—Theo lay for days so ill with fever that she knew none of them, and the doctor told them that he did not think she could recover. But she did recover—very slowly, very sadly, as if it was a terrible weariness to be dragged back into life again. As soon as it was possible to move her, Gerald took her away to the river, leaving his Kimberley affairs in the hands of Bob Stirling and Hugh. The claim was sold—that miserable claim, to which one life had already been sacrificed, and the house, and the furniture, and the horses; for the doctor said that Mrs. Fane must go home to England, and Gerald was only too glad, now, to escape from that terrible place and that terrible country. Africa had, indeed, shown him now her dark, her awful side; the freedom and grandeur of her life seemed now to be mere shadows; or

the freedom was unlimited despair, and the grandeur was that of an iron, crushing fate.

At this time one of Theo's wishes was realised; Gerald and Hugh began to like each other. Hugh's quiet considerateness had a soothing effect on Gerald, who was half wild, poor fellow! with grief and anxiety. Hugh was very sorry for him, when he looked round at Kimberley and its inhabitants, and remembered how the young man had banished himself here, feeling that he must leave England for no fault of his own. There must be something in him, Hugh concluded, having the fairest mind in the world. Theo, after all, would hardly have loved a worthless fellow with all the strength of her noble nature as she had loved Gerald, even to following him here. Hugh thought that if he had himself realised the tenth part of what it meant,

going out to Africa, he would have moved heaven and earth to stop Theo's going.

But as it was, he was glad to be able to assure himself that her devotion had not been quite wasted; she had probably saved this fellow from utter shipwreck; for though there was a certain boyish clearness of character about Gerald, which Hugh liked and appreciated as he came to know him better, he saw that his mind was not that of a very strong man. His passionate love and anxiety for Theo, mixed, as it seemed, with something like remorse; his dread and agony at any hint of danger, made Hugh moralise a little, wondering what would have happened to the fellow if she had never belonged to him at all.

When Kimberley was done with at last, and she was just well enough to travel, they drove down in a cart of their own to the

railway. The weather was tremendously hot ; the parched plains glowed red and yellow under the glowing sky ; it was impossible to travel in the heat of the day, and Hugh was sometimes afraid that they had moved Theo too soon. But she did not think so herself, and did not seem to feel the heat much. She noticed nothing by the way, and spoke very little. She did not sleep much, but lay back in a sort of indifferent dream, very sad, with half-closed eyes, hardly aware of any one but Gerald.

When he touched her hand, she would look up into his face and smile—Hugh thought he would rather have seen tears than such a smile. Since the day little Gerald died, she had never once spoken of him, never shown by any sign that she missed him. Hugh almost feared sometimes that she had lost her memory ; but Combe did not think so.

At Cape Town she stayed a few days with Mrs. Forester, to rest after her journey; and with her she was just the same—gentle, sad, silent, receiving all her friend's tender care with a sort of peaceful indifference, only restless when Gerald was away.

Mrs. Forester, who could have given her such perfect sympathy, saw that it was no use offering it, but she talked to Hugh and comforted him, and told him that time and England would be the only cure.

Theo awoke at last from her long dream, and found herself in her grandmother's drawing-room one cold, foggy afternoon in early spring. She was on the sofa, covered with a fur rug. Lady Redcliff was in her own old chair opposite. Just now, Gerald and Ada had been in the room; Ada sitting on a footstool by Theo, silent, and holding her

hand ; Gerald answering all manner of questions which Lady Redcliff was asking him about Africa. Lady Redcliff seemed to like Gerald very much ; she watched him with twinkling eyes, and said nothing ill-natured. When he and Ada had gone out together, she sat smiling oddly to herself for a minute or two. At last she said in a sharp little voice :

“ Thank you, Theo ; I’m very much obliged to you, my dear.”

“ What for, grandmamma ? ” said Theo.

“ Can’t I make a remark ? ” said Lady Redcliff. “ Don’t catechise—don’t be priggish, like your excellent cousin. Well, so you are quite strong now, are you ? ”

“ Oh yes,” said Theo wearily. “ The cold agrees with me. I wish I had always been cold.” And she shivered as she spoke.

“ You always used to be—an icicle, except

when you were in a rage," said her grandmother. "It was a bad business going out to that murderous climate—about the worst piece of mischief I ever did in my life. Don't you think so?"

"No; I don't know——"

"You and Gerald are two of the silliest fools I ever met," said Lady Redcliff. "You know it was all my fault, and yet you are as friendly to me as if I was the dearest and kindest relation in the world."

"So you are," said Theo quietly. "Who else would have thought of sending for us home? Grandmamma," she said, and she opened her eyes, and a strange, beautiful light seemed to shine in her face, "you love me better than anybody in the world, and I love you."

"What nonsense you talk!" said Lady Redcliff, giving her a quick glance, and look-

ing down. "Why, Theo—after all you have suffered—and you can't imagine that I cared about it all."

"I don't imagine—I know," said Theo. "And I am very glad that he and I were out there together. We belong to each other—more than any one here can understand. If there are depths out there, the heights are just as wonderful. There is only one thing—if I could have shown you my baby——"

Lady Redcliff looked at her sharply; she suspected rightly that this was the first time Theo had mentioned her baby.

"Ah, poor little fellow!" she said, in a strange, soft voice. "And yet, do you know, my dear, I have been capable of wishing that at least one or two of my children had died when they were babies. I don't enter into any doctrines or imaginations about them—

that you understand; but your boy, every day he lives, he belongs to you less. If you lose him very soon, you lose him at any rate before he has loved any one but you."

It was an odd sort of consolation, and perhaps Theo did not quite hear it or take it in; but she began to tell her grandmother all about the baby, crying softly now and then.

Lady Redcliff listened with wonderful patience and kindness, presently moving to a chair by Theo's side, and laying her cold little wrinkled hand on her forehead.

"Now look here, child," she said presently, when Theo was calmer, "you have had enough trial and trouble for the years you have lived, it seems to me. When I told you just now that I was very much obliged to you, had you the faintest idea what I meant?"

"You had been talking to Gerald, and I thought you might mean that you were obliged to me for him," said Theo with a happy smile, looking up into the old face beside her.

"That is exactly what I did mean," said Lady Redcliff, nodding. "And now I want to know what you are going to do with that poor young man in future? Not set him to some stupefying work again, I hope?"

"He must find something to do; we have spent all our money."

"Yes; you seem to have behaved like a wonderful pair of idiots. But I warned you long ago that he couldn't work. He was not born to make money, but to spend it. I told you so before, and you knew quite well I was right. Now, do you see what I am driving at?"

“Not quite,” said Theo.

“Then you are blind. You and he are my children. He must do nothing, and you must have this house for your home. Ah yes, I know you used to be frightfully bored here, but it won’t be so bad, perhaps, now that you have him. You needn’t look disgusted. I’ll make him a good allowance.”

“But, grandmamma—thank you so much—but he could not!” exclaimed Theo, quite roused by this startling proposal.

“Why not? I have nothing to do with the Norths,” said Lady Redcliff rather angrily, bringing a sudden flush of colour into Theo’s face.

“He could not,” she repeated.

“He can, and he shall,” said Lady Redcliff.

“He won’t, grandmamma.”

“He will. I know him better than you do. You were always the blindest person in

the world ; you always thought, if you liked people, that they must want to do what they ought. I know better, my dear. I wonder by this time you have not picked up more knowledge of men. Mr. Gerald will be very glad to be lazy, and to live on somebody else for the rest of his life."

Theo coloured almost angrily ; but then she could not help smiling.

"On the contrary," she said, "Gerald likes work, and if you ask him he will tell you so."

"I dare say he will ; but I shall not believe him. You will see ; I shall settle it all. He is not so downright ungracious and ungrateful as you."

"I'm sorry——"

"Don't be a humbug."

"But he is quite as independent as I am."

There is no knowing how long this dispute

might have gone on, or how angry Lady Redcliff would have become with Theo's obstinacy. Probably they would have argued till Gerald came in to answer for himself. But in the midst the butler came to ask if Mrs. Goodall could see Mrs. Fane.

"Mrs. Goodall! What a bore! Do you want to see that fat creature?" said Lady Redcliff.

"Yes, please," said Theo meekly.

"I hope she has not brought a dozen babies. Are there any babies, Finn?"

Finn gravely answered that he thought there was one in the carriage.

"Let it stay there. What a fool the woman is!" said Lady Redcliff, half aside.

Helen came in, fair, and placid, and peaceful. She was dreadfully afraid of Lady Redcliff, but she did not show it in the least, except by watching her a little anxiously

after her first greeting with Theo. She sat and asked little questions, and answered Theo's questions, and looked at her with soft, sympathising eyes. Even in this dark room it was easy to see what a change there was in Theo. Helen was very sorry, but she could say nothing now—certainly not while this old dragon, as she mentally called Lady Redcliff, was in the room.

“Well, Theo,” she said presently, “has Gerald made any plans yet?”

“For the future? No,” said Theo, glancing across at her grandmother, who was amusing herself by staring at Helen.

The rich potter's wife was a soft, pretty sight in her furs and velvets; her fair bright hair, her delicate skin, her sleepy eyes, with their long lashes, were unchanged from the girlish days when Lady Redcliff had seen her before. It was a sort of beauty that

Lady Redcliff despised; all milk and sugar, as she described it. She looked from one young woman to the other, and wondered if any one on earth could admire Mrs. Goodall more than Mrs. Fane. Theo looked years older than Helen now; hardship, and illness, and grief had left a mark never to be effaced—no, not by a whole lifetime of idleness and ease. No one could ever look into Theo's face now without seeing that she had suffered. Her girl-beauty was gone; but there were two or three people who thought that she was more beautiful than ever.

“You are a contrast, you two,” said Lady Redcliff suddenly.

“Poor Theo! no wonder,” said Mrs. Goodall softly and pityingly; there was at least no doubt in her mind that the advantage was on her side.

She took Theo's hand and held it caressingly, while Theo lay and smiled at her.

"When people are weak, they don't like to be pulled about," said Lady Redcliff impatiently ; but Helen did not take this remark to herself at all.

"I hear you have brought a child with you," said Lady Redcliff ; "he will catch cold, or measles, or something, if you keep him waiting long in a cab."

"Oh, thank you very much ; he is well wrapped up, and nurse will take good care of him," said Helen innocently ; she thought Lady Redcliff was going to ask the baby in. "You wouldn't like to see him, Theo ?" she suggested, turning to her cousin.

"I think, perhaps——" Theo began.

"I won't have it," said Lady Redcliff ; "quite enough excitement for her to see you,

without being introduced to a strange child ; though, no doubt, he is immensely worth seeing."

"As to that," said Helen, smiling good-humouredly, "I dare say he would seem to you much the same as other babies."

"No ; I'm quite aware that there never was such a child before. He is the image of his father, isn't he ? How is his father ?"

"Very well, thank you ; he is in London, but I thought he had better not come with me to-day."

"What a horrid disappointment !" said Lady Redcliff ; "I should have been charmed to see him. I respect Mr. Goodall ; he is something unique in my experience."

Here even Helen's placid mind began to suspect impertinence, and she turned away to Theo with a faint extra shade of colour in her cheeks. But a little feeling of defiance

made her go on talking about John. She was an excellent wife ; she liked John much better now than when she married him, and though she was not quite blind to his defects, she thought him in most things very superior to other men.

“ Do you know, Theo,” she said, “ John has been wondering very much what Gerald means to do. He has made no plans, then ? ”

“ Other people may have made plans for him, perhaps,” remarked Lady Redcliff. “ Tell Mr. Goodall so, with my compliments, if he thinks of teaching him to make pots.”

Helen gave Lady Redcliff a rather bored little smile ; she thought this was only a rude joke, not worth noticing, and she went on talking to Theo, who lay looking with grave, tired eyes ; it did not seem necessary, then, to explain what her grandmother meant.

“I don’t know that I ought to say anything about it,” said Helen; “perhaps I ought to leave it to John, but I should so much like to know what you think, Theo. Of course to me it seems a most delightful idea, but you may think it very uninteresting.”

“Don’t mystify the poor thing; her brain won’t stand much exhausting,” said Lady Redcliff; “I’m curious, too, to know what Mr. Goodall has imagined, but I must warn you it is all of no use.”

“Don’t say that, grandmamma,” said Theo, lifting up her head. “Tell me, Nell; John is very kind; what is it?”

“Well, dear,” said Helen, with a little hesitation, “you know the old house at Deerhurst, where Gerald used to live. I think I told you in a letter that John had bought it and the colliery. And it struck him the other day that if Gerald had nothing else

to do you might like to come and live there and he could have his old post of manager, if he wouldn't despise it—till he gets something better. Of course it is a bad neighbourhood, but you know it already, and you and I would have each other. Of course I see lots of advantages, but then it is quite impossible for me not to look at it selfishly, don't you see, Theo?"

She stopped, looking at her cousin with real eagerness and anxiety, but Theo's eyes were fixed on Lady Redcliff, who had flung herself back in her chair and snatched up a newspaper.

"John is very kind," Theo repeated absently; then, after a moment's pause, she looked at Helen and smiled. "Thank you so much," she said; "Gerald must decide. Everybody is very kind to us. I must tell you, Nell, how good grandmamma has been."

"Don't be a fool or a hypocrite," said Lady Redcliff behind her newspaper.

At that moment, before Theo had time to say anything more, the door opened and Gerald came in. He looked bright and well, and he and Helen met as cordially as if they had been old friends.

"I have just seen Mr. Goodall," he said to her. "He has done me an immense kindness; he has given me work to do, and a house to live in. He is the best fellow I ever met."

Helen flushed with pleasure, and Theo could not help smiling as she looked at him; but for a moment neither of them spoke. The first voice heard was Lady Redcliff's, she herself being still hidden from sight by *The Times*.

"What a happy release for me!" said this old philosopher.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ROSES.

DEERHURST LODGE, the house where Theo had been so happy one rainy day in autumn, had an odd little charm of its own, which she felt more and more, day after day, when she began to live there. She and Gerald stayed in London most of the spring, and came down to Deerhurst at the beginning of the beautiful summer, bringing Ada with them. That year the summer was wonderful for its heat and beauty; the calm, serene, glowing sunshine almost reminded them sometimes of Africa.

The little house lay surrounded by green sloping lawns ; its rough-cast walls had a dark trellis running along the lower part of them and seemed to be planted in flowers of many colours, running up and shining brightly among their green leaves. It was like a little old house in a picture-book. Inside, the old oak rooms were full of dark, cool shade, and sweet and gay with bowls of roses ; the lower garden was full of roses. On the smooth turf all about soft breezes sometimes stirred the shadows of the wych-elms and the beech-trees. The sloping bank in front of the house was shaded by three large old trees, and the roots of one of these — a sturdy, wide-branching ash — made a natural arm-chair, where Theo used to spend many hours of those summer days, watched solemnly by Wool and Toby, lying side by side.

She was weak, and tired, and languid, and very dreamy, though the life was coming back to her by degrees; and Ada, as she sat at her feet and watched her, perfectly happy in taking care of her while Gerald was away, wondered a great deal about the country and the life that had taken all Theo's strong young energy away.

They did not talk very much through those long afternoons; sometimes she liked Ada to read to her out of old favourite books, not much caring for anything new; sometimes Mrs. Goodall came and brought her children, and little fat Johnny rolled about on the grass, and Ada played with him, while the cousins sat together under the tree. Ada was always shy of Helen, and not very fond of her; she wondered a little at the happy look which came into Theo's eyes when she was there.

Ada had very different feelings about Captain North, who came down once early in the summer. She thought of him with a happy little enthusiasm, the hero who had gone to that dreadful Africa, and had brought Theo and Gerald home. One day he gave her such a description of Kimberley and the journey there that she could not think of it afterwards without thrills of horror, and admired him, and pitied her two darlings more than ever.

Theo herself never talked of Africa, except to Gerald. Towards evening, when he came home, Ada used to go away into the garden with a basket to gather roses, leaving them together. Away she went, the little lonely figure, past the thick old apple-trees, where there was only a narrow shady path between the orchard and the yard wall; down the hill, where the old walnut-tree, a little tired of life, was already scattering yellow leaves upon the

walk—down among the roses, which grew in wild profusion among laurel, and laurustinus, and honeysuckle, and ivy climbing over low old walls, and clustering everywhere. There she wandered up and down, and filled her basket, and laid her face caressingly against the loveliest roses, as if she asked them to forgive her for carrying them away.

The long, pretty walk of this garden, where primroses bloomed in spring, and roses, and pinks, and lilies in summer, was bordered by a thick hawthorn hedge, with honeysuckle and elder breaking out here and there. One may say, in passing, that this garden was very full of trees and hedges, and thus it was a paradise of birds, who sang there night and day all through the spring, and lived on strawberries and currants all the summer, to sweeten their voices for the following year.

But on the other side of this hedge just mentioned, there was a steep grass-field rising up—a sort of sheep-walk, with little paths and ledges about it, with great patches of gorse and blackberry-bushes, and old thorn-trees, and wild crab-trees, and low oaks scattered here and there along the upper slope, where grew that group of Scotch firs which bordered the lane towards Woodcote—those same firs that Theo used to see dark against the sunset from her window in Mr. Goodall's house, so very long ago.

This field belonged to Deerhurst Lodge, and the yard and garden opened on one end of it, where there was an old ice-house, and a stack of wood, and one or two hay-ricks between the buildings and the lane. At its far-away end the field had another gate, opening into a steep bit of lane which ran into the other lane, under a row of tall

oaks. It was only a grass path this way between the house and the meadows; but any one coming by the field-road from Mainley could find his way to the house by it, instead of by the upper lane, though it was not generally used, and was not, in fact, a public path at all. A narrow track ran along between the gorse-bushes, not far from the foot of the slope, but yet so high above the garden-hedge that a man could look over it, and see everything and everybody in the garden. So it happened that Ada Fane, peacefully gathering roses in the long walk, was not so entirely alone as she fancied herself.

Her face was grave, for, when she was not with Theo, and thinking of her, she could not help thinking a great deal of that poor baby, left behind in Africa. The idea of him had been so very attractive, poor dear

little delicate thing ! Ada used to fancy herself nursing him for hours, loving him all the more for his weakness and need of comforting. She could only talk about him to Combe, who told her histories enough. Gerald had mentioned him once or twice, but with such pain that Ada carefully avoided the subject in future. Theo never said anything about him at all, but her little sister knew that he was never out of her thoughts. After she first heard of his birth, Ada had learnt one or two lullabies, and funny little songs that she thought he would like. Nobody must hear them now, except the birds in the garden ; but Ada often sang to them in a low voice, and she thought they stopped their own songs to listen to her ; probably their taste was not more classical than little Gerald's would have been. She was singing that evening, but not, as she imagined, to

the birds alone. A stranger had come along the path between the gorse-bushes, walking on the soft grass noiselessly ; and when he had passed a tall holly-bush which marked the corner of the garden, he looked over the hedge and saw all the flowers growing, and a slim girl's figure dressed in pale blue, with a fair, flushed face, and a head of gold-brown curls, stooping amongst them, and heard a sweet, plaintive voice singing some venerable nonsense of nursery-rhyme—"A pie sat on a pear-tree," or something of that kind.

He stood quite still and watched her ; she had no idea of him, but went on filling her basket with roses, while the evening sun shone softly over the garden, where the thrushes pecked away at the ripest strawberries, hopping in and out and enjoying themselves without fear. The stranger pulled his

hat over his eyes, for the sun shone straight into them, dazzling him provokingly.

“It can’t be the right house,” he said to himself. “They can’t have any one like this belonging to them. I should have known, somehow. This is an adventure.”

He walked on very slowly, keeping parallel with Ada as she moved along the path. At last she began to climb a little, and he to descend; she was coming up the hill under the walnut-tree, and the thick hedge stopped here, changing into a rough paling, so that they were no longer hidden from each other. Ada glanced up at him in quick surprise, with almost a start of fear; she had a kind of dread that Mr. Warren might appear again, and though she was now quite safe from his persecutions, the idea was very disagreeable. But this was a stranger, and the pleasantest-looking man, Ada thought, that she had ever seen.

He was more sunburnt even than Gerald, and had a light beard, which made him look older than he was. There was something particularly delightful in his manner as he took his hat off, and asked whether this was Deerhurst Lodge. Ada's experience of young men had been very small; her idea of perfection had lately been Captain North, of whom, however, she was very much afraid, and whose manner, even when he meant to be nice, was always cold and indifferent. The admiration she had had, poor child! had been of a sort to make her shrink and shudder. She stopped politely in the path to answer this stranger's questions, smiling, and holding her basket of roses.

"Thank you," he said, "I'm very glad," when she had assured him that this was Deerhurst. "But I am afraid this is the wrong way in, and people don't like one to storm

their back-doors. I have made some mistake, certainly."

He stopped, for he was almost puzzled by the look in the girl's face ; it seemed as if she knew him already, and was glad to see him.

"Do forgive me," he said, after a moment's pause ; "but you are not anybody I knew before I left England?"

"Oh no, certainly not," said Ada, blushing and smiling.

"I thought I couldn't quite have lost my memory. Only it almost seemed as if you were kind enough to recognise me."

"Yes," said Ada, with deeper blushes ; "I think I do. I have seen your photograph. I think you are—Mr. Stirling."

"But you don't know how delightful that is," cried Bob enthusiastically. "Why, the other day, when I went home—walked in like this, you know—my sisters didn't know me

a bit. And I can't ever have seen your photograph, or else, of course, I should have recognised you."

"Did you never see it at Kimberley? My brother had it," said Ada.

"Well, I don't know; at any rate, it wasn't like you. May I suppose, then, that you are Gerald Fane's sister?" said Bob with a sort of gentle eagerness.

All this time he was in the field, and she in the garden, but now they walked on and reached the gate, and he joined her in the path. Here she gravely shook hands with him, and said that her brother and sister would be very glad to see him.

"Poor dear Mrs. Fane! how is she?" said Bob. "Is she getting like herself again?"

"She is still very weak and sad," said Ada. "Oh no, she is not like herself, and she never mentions the baby."

“What a dreadful business that was!” said Bob. “Gerald ought never to have come to the Fields, you know; he wasn’t half rough enough for the sort of life—and bringing his wife there was simple madness. It was a shock to me, really, when I first saw them there. I thought they were travelling about to amuse themselves. What a beautiful garden you have! I never in my life saw such roses.”

“I was so dreadfully sorry when Gerald went,” said Ada. “It is very nice to have them at home again. I think they are under the trees near the house.”

“I hope the sight of me won’t be a shock to Mrs. Fane. What do you think?” said Bob, lingering at the gate. “Do you know, Miss Fane, I think you gather roses in such a funny way. I saw you over the hedge. You left several behind that I thought the

prettiest in the garden. There was one particularly—a beautiful pink bud. I don't often want things that don't belong to me," said Bob, lifting his eyes for a moment from the roses; "but I thought at the time that I wanted that bud. I dare say Mrs. Fane has told you wonderful things about the flowers in Africa, but I assure you that flowers in England beat them hollow. I thought so, especially when I saw that rose, and you left it."

Ada listened, smiling, to all this.

"If you want it so much," she said, "would you like to go and fetch it? I'll go and tell them that you are come. Here are my scissors."

Bob drew back from the scissors with a little air of alarm.

"Please don't leave me alone in this garden," he said; "somebody might take me up for trespassing, or I might lose my

way. And I dare say I couldn't find the rose after all. Have you any idea where it is?"

"Oh yes; I know it quite well," said Ada.

And so this conversation ended, as Bob meant it should, by their going down again together into the garden to look for that rose. Ada thought she had never met any one before who was so fond of flowers. Bob Stirling seemed to care for them as much as she did herself. Neither had she ever met any one who was so delightful to talk to, so perfectly kind and sympathetic about Theo, so bright, happy, and unprejudiced. And then there was the mysterious but most pleasant feeling that this charming stranger, much as he cared for the flowers, was a little absent among them, and often forgot to look at something especially lovely, when he was talking to her. He might have made all the long journey from Africa with no object but that of talking

to her ; yet this, strange to say, was impossible, because he did not even remember her photograph, and had not taken in the idea that Gerald Fane had a sister at all.

While this new friendship was being made in the garden, Gerald and Theo were sitting under the ash-tree in front of the house, very happy in their own way. They had been talking a little about Ada and her future, expecting every moment to see her come round the house with her basket of roses. But the sun sank lower, and the shadows grew longer and longer, and Ada did not come, so at last Theo asked Gerald to go and look for her, and he strolled down into the garden whistling. Then quite innocently along the rose-path came Ada and Mr. Stirling, and Bob had evidently not forgotten to take care of himself ; for he was wearing the prettiest pink bud in his button-hole.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

BOB.

GERALD and Theo agreed that their friend Bob Stirling's proceedings were more colonial than anything they had seen since they left the colonies. If it had been any one but Bob, Gerald would certainly have been angry with him. To come into one's house the wrong way, storm one's garden, steal one's roses, almost make love to one's sister in the first half-hour of their acquaintance—these free-and-easy ways would have been rather hard to bear, if Bob had not been himself; but he was one of those happy fellows who may

steal what they choose, while other men may not look over the hedge.

Bob's frank devotion to Ada was apparent from the very first moment ; he had instantly lost his heart to the little rose-maiden, with her gold-brown hair and laughing eyes. As for Ada, all the little plaintive sadness had vanished from her manner since Bob arrived. Suddenly, unexpectedly, appearing out of space, on the green hill above the garden, without any mention of trains, or sound of wheels, or sight of luggage, Ada's fairy prince had come as such a person ought. He and Ada were both quite capable of feeling the romance of it all ; it was a small extra satisfaction that their first meeting might have happened in a story-book.

Theo and Gerald had welcomed Bob with the warmest friendliness. That evening they talked for a long time about Africa, and it

seemed to Ada, who sat listening, that Theo liked talking about it; she asked with interest for so many people, and looked with a sort of eagerness at a Diamond Fields newspaper which Bob gave her. Ada came and looked over her shoulder, but could see nothing but strings of odd advertisements, a great deal about the sale of "claims," which she did not understand, and accounts of various fights and rows, and consequent law-cases.

"What a horrid place it must have been!" she said, in a low voice.

"Yes, a horrid place," said Mr. Stirling. "I never wish to see it again. And yet—do you feel that, Gerald?"

"No, I hate it," Gerald said.

"I know what you mean," said Theo, lifting her eyes from the paper, and looking at Bob. "And yet—Africa is splendid. The

life has gone out of life since we came home to England."

Gerald looked at her a little gloomily.

"Oh, Theo!" Ada whispered in her ear.

"I didn't mean to go nearly so far as that, you know," Bob said, in a sort of apology. "No, I always liked England best, and this time I like it better than ever, and I don't mean to go away again. But there is something—there's the endless feeling, and the colour—Mrs. Fane, of course, feels all that more intensely than we do."

"Yes; and it was all very well at first," said Gerald. "You wouldn't like to go back again, Theo?"

"Yes, I should," said Theo dreamily.

There was a little pause; her words seemed strange to them all; none of them quite understood her; to Gerald and Ada she gave a slight chilling pain, and Bob was

surprised; but no one could ask her why, or what she meant. In the silence Bob looked at Ada, and she met his eyes for a moment, and then looked rather shyly away. Then Bob began to talk again, and the shadow passed.

That night, as the two old friends were smoking together, Bob told Gerald all about his affairs: how he had wound up everything at Kimberley, selling his interest in the claim to Slater and Cumming, who were not yet satisfied with their gains, and were working on there still.

“I’ve got about two thousand a year,” said Bob. “And to tell you the truth, I feel thoroughly unsettled. For the last two or three weeks, you know, I have been at home, going with my mother and the girls to tennis-parties. I met a great many people I used to know, but nobody knew me again, and when

they found me out, they gave me to understand that I was awfully gone off. And the girls are always being surprised at everything I say and do ; they are very well set up themselves, with a nice little lot of ideas and opinions on every subject. They play tennis rather well, and read novels, except Mary, who goes in for science, and free thought, and the church of the future, and a few more subjects which make a young woman horrid to talk to. I do hate educated women. But I am almost more afraid of the very orthodox fashionable sort, who know nothing, and are contemptuous."

"Don't be rude to your sisters; they used to be very pretty, at any rate," said Gerald.

"They will never marry," said Bob with decision. "I see it; they're getting stereotyped. But I have not told you the worst

thing of all. My mother wants me to marry one of their greatest friends. She is rather good-looking, and rather clever, and she knows exactly what is right on all subjects. She has no money, and no relations to matter much. What were you going to say?" asked Bob a little nervously.

"I didn't know you had any idea of marrying. Well, you are wise to have waited till now."

"I hadn't much idea of it. I came away here to escape—because you know it becomes rather dangerous, when your mother and five sisters have made up their minds about a thing."

"Poor chap! I should think so," said Gerald kindly.

"Till to-day," said Bob, stroking his beard, and looking thoughtful, "I had never seen anybody I admired as much as Mrs. Fane."

"Thank you," said Gerald.

"But of course — well, I don't know whether you will be surprised — I have at last seen the girl I want to marry. She — I say your sister is more perfectly lovely——"

Bob broke down and laughed; then he went on more reasonably:

"I hope you will tell me if there is anything that makes it useless to think of it. If so, I'll go away to-morrow."

Gerald did not at once reply. Bob looked at him nervously; it now occurred to him for the first time that there might be some obstacle; of course, after all, was it quite likely that Ada Fane in her loveliness would have waited for him? For a minute Gerald sat looking on the floor; then he remembered his friend's anxiety, and said with rather a puzzled smile:

"I'm very much obliged to you, Bob."

"Well, then it's all right, isn't it?" said Bob eagerly.

"There is nothing that would make me more glad for Ada," said Gerald; but——"

He stopped, evidently embarrassed.

"You think she won't?" said Bob. "You think there is somebody else in the way?"

"No, I don't."

"Then what do you mean?"

They were sitting in the study, the small old room, with its long window and low walls. Ada's picture did not hang there now, for Theo had put it in her own room; but as Gerald listened to his friend's talk, certain scenes in his own life, in that room, one of them connected with Ada, came back to him very vividly. He could see Clarence walking up and down, could hear him saying that Ada should marry Warren when

she was seventeen. And then the temptation of the next day, and Theo at the gate, his angel, turning him back. And then those other moments with Clarence, when his brother had so calmly told the story of his own disgrace, which, to Gerald's feeling then, banished him from England, and Theo, and all his hopes for ever. And even now, the shadow of that disgrace seemed often to fall upon him; in spite of all Theo's love, and trust, and pride, he felt himself still involved in Clarence's shame. Ada knew nothing of it; he hoped she never would; but he could not let his friend marry Ada in ignorance of it. Bob saw that there was some struggle going on in Gerald's mind. He was very fond of Gerald, whose morbid fits grieved him, without making him at all angry, for he was a patient, good-tempered man.

"There is something wrong, old fellow! What is it?" he said, after waiting for a few minutes silently.

"I am glad you spoke to me first," said Gerald, "because I must have told you this anyhow, and it may make a great difference. You may wish to withdraw what you have said, and I shall not have any right to be surprised."

"You would be surprised, however, wouldn't you?" said Bob. "I can't imagine anything——"

"Stop. Don't commit yourself any further," said Gerald, smiling a little. "I have got a horrid story to tell you."

Bob stared at him in astonishment. "Is it necessary that I should be harrowed like this?" he inquired.

"Yes; if you mean what you have said about my sister, it is necessary," said Gerald;

and sitting in the same attitude, with his eyes bent on the floor, he told Bob what Clarence had done.

“And so, after I heard it,” he ended his story, “I gave her up and went out to Africa; but she wouldn’t—unhappily for her—and I asked her to come, and she came, and the rest of it you know.”

“I know that you are a lucky fellow,” said Bob, “for you have two of the most charming women in England for your wife and your sister, and in their different ways the most beautiful too. But you are discontented still—and you have a friend, but you won’t trust him; you rake up a painful old story to tell him, and think that he will shake off the dust from his feet and disappear, because you have a half-brother in South America who has not always been as good as the rest of his family. Look here,

Gerald, you will have to give your sister to me, because I shall take better care of her than you will."

"Thank you, Bob," said Gerald quietly.

Theo had a great deal to do the next day in comforting Ada, who came to her whenever she could escape from Bob, to ask whether she was perfectly shocked; whether they had behaved too badly ever to be forgiven; if such extraordinary haste had ever been heard of before. To meet a man for the first time one evening at sunset, to be followed down into the garden early the next morning, before breakfast, when she had stolen away quite quietly to think things over and gather a rose, to return from the garden in half-an-hour's time, having promised to marry that man! Was it wonderful that Ada quite declined to face her brother and sister, and instead of coming in to breakfast fled back

to her own room. Theo went to her there (Mr. Stirling having confessed his crime), and found the child crying; but she was soon comforted, and whispered to Theo that it was dreadful to be so happy.

That evening Theo was very tired. Gerald pulled her sofa forward to the drawing-room window, close to all the flowers in the balcony, and the stars began to shine in the quiet evening sky. Somewhere away in the garden the two happy lovers were wandering; and these two old married people had been talking about them, as they sat together in the window.

"Bob is so boyish; they are like happy children," said Theo.

"Things are very differently arranged for different people," Gerald said, looking at her. "Isn't it unfair? Here's Bob—no anxieties, no doubts, no fears, no suspense

—when I look at him, and think what I had to go through, Theo, I pity myself—don't you?"

"Foolish boy!" said Theo. "You and I could not have been like that. We had to have patience, and to find each other out."

"I didn't want to find you out. I knew all about you on Helen's wedding-day."

"Did you?" said Theo. "But, Gerald, this engagement would be a frightful risk for almost anybody. It is only because these two are so transparent and childish and nice, without any dark depths, my dear, like you and me. Of course one sees they will be perfectly happy together."

"There's something that comes over me sometimes," said Gerald, after a long pause. "I feel as if I had spoilt your life, Theo. Since you married me you have had nothing

but trouble and sorrow. When I look at them it makes me think of it—because I know Bob will never have to say that to Ada.”

Theo did not contradict him. He was sitting beside her on the low window-seat, holding her hand, and she was looking out past the flowers, into the soft depths of sky.

“I know you feel that,” she said presently, drawing him nearer; “but, my darling, you ought to trust me more. We should never have belonged to each other so perfectly as we do, without our sorrow. I have looked at them to-day, and thought I would rather have my sorrow than all their happiness, present and future too. Do you believe me, Gerald?”

CHAPTER XL.

THE OLD FAIRY.

“YES, very true; it was all my doing, all my fault; I quite acknowledge that,” said Lady Redcliff.

Hugh North did not exactly know what he had said to bring out this acknowledgment; Lady Redcliff was, perhaps, answering her own thoughts, rather than his. Of course they had been talking of Theo, their one subject in common.

“But I never pretended, you know, to be a good grandmother,” Lady Redcliff went on, almost angrily. “I never understood young people—I hate them, especially girls. Theo,

of course, was an exception, but then she was different from ordinary girls."

"I should think so," said Hugh, in a low voice. "I always thought there was something so—so perfectly fine about her."

"Ah!" Lady Redcliff gave a sort of sigh. "I know what you mean. And poor Gerald—I thought he had it too, when I saw him first; I fell very much in love with him. But there always was a strain of weakness in the Fanes. Well, I suppose they are as happy as other people, so far. Theo will get tired of him by-and-by, but I dare say she will be too generous to let him see it."

Hugh was silent; it did not give him any particular satisfaction to think that Theo would presently be tired of her husband. However, he did not believe it was likely.

"If the child had lived, it might have been a different thing," said Lady Redcliff. "Then Theo would have had something to

look forward to. The death of that child broke her heart; she told me as much, after she came home, and I saw it in her face. But now—Gerald will get lazy and selfish, and lose his good looks, and she, of course, lost hers in that abominable climate—and, in fact, poor things! I see nothing but deadly dulness before them. Well, I did my best to prevent it, with just the contrary effect. It was my interference that sent Theo out to Africa.”

“It is very difficult to guess the result of what one does,” said Hugh thoughtfully. “I left them very cheerful yesterday,” he went on, looking up. “All the preparations for Miss Fane’s wedding seemed to amuse Theo, rather.”

“A pack of fools!” said Lady Redcliff. “Did you see the digger? What is he like? Does he go about in his shirt-sleeves, and wear a hat in the house?”

“No, he is quite civilised; a nice sort

of fellow, rather talkative," said Hugh. "I knew him out there, you know. He is a very good specimen of a digger."

"That is not saying much, I suspect. You are very good-natured and charitable, Captain North. Were you always like that, or has your temper improved lately?"

"I believe it has," said Hugh. "I have been cultivating indifference, as a good preparation for India."

"Why on earth are you going to India?" asked Lady Redcliff.

"The regiment is ordered there, and I don't want to leave the army."

Lady Redcliff remained silent for a minute or two, watching him with her sharp black eyes. Hugh had altered very much in the last two years; he had no longer the air of calm self-satisfaction which used to enrage her. He looked like a man who had gone through a storm of trouble; his face was thin, his eyes

were hollow and grave, and he stooped a little as he sat.

“Will India agree with you?” said Lady Redcliff suddenly.

“No, I believe not; the doctors say it won’t,” he answered, smiling.

“Then how foolish to go!”

“I don’t care much, you see. My life is of no value to anybody.”

This was a very desperate speech for Hugh, and he perhaps felt a little ashamed of it, for he got up and came towards Lady Redcliff, holding out his hand.

She took no notice of this, however.

“You have made your will, I suppose, and left everything to Theo,” she said.

Hugh lifted his eyebrows, and smiled.

“Has my lawyer been confiding in you, Lady Redcliff?” he said. “Yes; I did that before I went out to Africa.”

“Poor man—good man!” said Lady

Redcliff, looking at him with a smile, and almost a sort of dimness over her eyes. "I am sorry I used to hate you—but to a wicked old woman like me, you are rather hard to understand. Why didn't you ask Theo to marry you years ago—ages ago, before Gerald Fane was seen or dreamt of?"

"Because I did not know, then, how much I loved her," said Hugh very quietly. "But it would have been no use, even then; she would never have cared for me."

"She might have married you, though, before she knew what it was to be in love," said Lady Redcliff, with a small laugh. "I should have raged, but that would have been very much in your favour, as she always opposed me."

Hugh stood looking out of the window for a moment.

"I think it is best as it is," he said. "I

think that would have been worse than this, do you know."

"Oh, really, do you?" said Lady Redcliff, with a sneer.

Her good moments were only moments, and she had not had many of them in her life. Suddenly her pity and liking for Hugh seemed to have passed away; he was, as she said, beyond her understanding. She wished him "good-bye" coldly enough, and let him go, and walked up and down her room for an hour afterwards, like a little caged tiger.

A few days after Hugh had sailed, Bob Stirling and Ada Fane were married in the little church at Deerhurst, which was all decorated with roses for the occasion. It was very different from Linwood Church, with its great chancel and stately windows, where Helen Fraser was married to John Goodall, and where Gerald Fane and Theo Meynell

had first seen each other. It was an odd contrast, too, to St. George's Cathedral at Cape Town. Theo stood dreaming, as she looked at Ada, perhaps the loveliest and happiest bride of all. She thought of these things, and then she thought of the lonely place where she had left her baby, with those great plains outstretching to the mountains, and the low marble cross with his name, the one memorial at Kimberley of their sad months there.

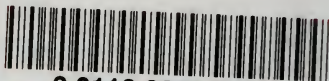
And then Theo lifted her eyes, and woke from her dream, once more to find Gerald looking at her, and smiled in answer to the look he gave her, remembering that after all she was happy.

THE END.

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